

A KEN HOLT Mystery

THE MYSTERY OF THE SULTAN'S SCIMITAR



By BRUCE CAMPBELL

THE MYSTERY OF THE SULTAN'S SCIMITAR

A KEN HOLT Mystery, No. 18, the last adventure in the series

By Bruce Campbell

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THE MYSTERY OF THE SULTAN'S SCIMITAR

News reporter Ken Holt and his photographer friend, Sandy Allen, are vacationing in southern Europe. True-born newsmen that they are, things just happen when they're around.

Minutes after they view the invaluable Knossos cylinder-the Golden Key to the language of the ancient Cretans-this prize artifact is stolen from the Athens Museum. What can they do? Nothing, Ken and Sandy decide. They're just tourists in Greece-strangers in a strange country where they don't know the language.

But before twenty-four hours have passed, the boys find themselves involved in this bizarre mystery. A suspicious-acting peddler sells them a Turkish scimitar. A newspaper clipping about the daring theft of the artifact mysteriously vanishes. A bossy American librarian has an odd acquaintance. And a friend from Athens flees when he sights them in the ancient city of Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia.

Unraveling the clues to a weirdly complex international gang takes as much brainwork as bravery. But the Golden Key is worth the effort. And, of course, there's a front-page story in it for the young newsmen.

Ken took after the fugitive, with Sandy at his heels

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CHAPTER I

THE GOLDEN KEY

Ken Holt braced himself as the small taxi swerved toward the curb and halted. The driver's arm gestured dramatically. The torrent of Greek words he flung over his shoulder to his two passengers was equally dramatic.

"Just what do you suppose that means?" Sandy Allen muttered to Ken. "And why did he bring us to a park? We want to go to the archaeological museum."

"Show him the paper again," Ken suggested.

Sandy took out of his pocket the slip on which their hotel clerk had written, in Greek characters, the name of the museum. Once more, as he had done when they first got in the cab, Sandy showed it to the driver.

The man waved it aside. Leaping from under the wheel, he opened the rear door and motioned Ken and Sandy out.

"Oh!" Ken said suddenly. "We're there! That's the museum on the far side of the park. I recognize it from the picture in our guidebook." He pointed to the imposing marble building fronted by plots of green grass and flower beds.

Ken was on the sidewalk, counting drachmas into the driver's hand, by the time Sandy had extricated his six-foot length from the interior of the small cab. Then they all exchanged grins of mutual congratulation over the successful completion of their journey.

The driver rattled off more unintelligible words, and again gestured toward the museum. It seemed clear that he was trying to assure them they would find their visit worthwhile, a remarkable experience.

Then the man leaped back into his cab, slewed it around in a tight turn, and disappeared down a narrow street in a cloud of blue smoke.

The boys started along one of the paved walks leading to the museum.

"At least this place isn't in ruins," Sandy said, with an exaggerated note of resignation in his voice. "When I think of the number of ruins we've seen since we landed in Greece three days ago." He ticked them off on the fingers of one big hand. "We climbed up to the Acropolis to examine ruins. We spent a day at Delphi, examining ruins. We prowled through that old Roman market place-more ruins. And the even older Greek market place-still more ruins."

"If you'd left your camera at the hotel while we took those trips, as I finally got you to do today," Ken told him, grinning, "you'd have had a chance to find out how interesting they were. But a person who cares more about a camera angle than ancient Greek culture."

"That's gratitude for you!" Sandy interrupted. "I spend the better part of my life adding zest to your dull news stories with my brilliant photographs-" He broke off to wave toward a figure standing at the top of the broad flight of stairs leading up to the columned front of the museum. "There's George, waiting for us. I'll go into the subject of your gross ingratitude later."

"You needn't bother," Ken assured him, as they quickened their steps. "Half the money we're spending on this trip came from the magazine sale of those pictures you took in Mexico. And I'm mighty glad to be here! Under the circumstances, I can admit you take a decent picture occasionally."

"It's nothing-just a slight touch of genius, that's all." Sandy grinned down at Ken's slim wiry figure, half a head shorter than his own. "For that matter, the other half of our trip is being paid for by the bonus Global gave you for your story about what we found down there."

They were referring to an adventure they had recently shared, an adventure the press had labeled *The Mystery of the Plumed Serpent*.

"I've always said you could write a decent sentence once in a while, when you really tried," Sandy added.

"It's nothing," Ken assured him in turn. "Just genius-and a slight touch of grammar."

They were both grinning as they mounted the steps to shake hands with George Pappas. The dapper, middle-aged man was chief of the Athens office of Global News, the international news service for which Ken's father traveled the world on special assignment, and which sometimes bought Ken's stories and Sandy's photographs.

Ever since the boys had reached Greece, Pappas had overwhelmed them with hospitality. He had squeezed his own work into odd hours, in order to plan their sightseeing and to accompany them when he thought he could be helpful. Today he was giving his Sunday afternoon to them because, he had said, there might be objects in the museum they could not fully appreciate without an English-speaking guide.

"And why should you pay for one when I am available?" he had demanded, with his warm smile.

"We're taking you out tonight for the best dinner in Athens," Ken announced when they joined him. "You just tell us where to get it. It won't be any kind of repayment for all you've done for us, but-"

"Nonsense! In Athens you are my guests." Then, before the boys could argue, Pappas thrust two letters at them. "These arrived at the

office yesterday for you. You will want to read them now, yes?" His English was slightly accented, but he was never at a loss for a word. "One is from your father, Ken. The other from Brentwood."

He smiled as he spoke the last word. Already he had assured the boys that one of the first places he hoped to visit when he went to the United States was the small New Jersey town where the redheaded Allen clan lived. It had been Ken's home too for several years, and Pappas had been fascinated by the stories he had heard from Richard Holt about the Allens' weekly newspaper, the *Brentwood Advance*. Ken's father had also told him about the occasion when he and Ken had fallen into the hands of merciless criminals determined to keep Richard Holt from exposing their international crime ring. The Allens had come to the rescue then, helping Ken to free his father. Ever since that first fortunate meeting, the Holts and the Allens had been close friends; and Ken, motherless since early childhood, had made his home with the Allens.

"We can't wait to get you over there, George," Ken said, slitting open the thin envelope from his father. "There aren't any ruins in Brentwood-but wait till you taste Mom's cooking!"

Then, with Sandy looking over his shoulder, he skimmed through the few lines Richard Holt had typed on Global News stationery. They merely confirmed arrangements already agreed upon. The boys would meet Mr. Holt in Venice. From there they would go to Milan and then to Switzerland, where Richard Holt was to cover a United Nations conference.

Sandy had the Brentwood letter open too. They read it together hurriedly, knowing they would go over its details again when they had more time.

Pop Allen's signature, scrawled in the heavy black of a copy pencil, ended several paragraphs describing the Brentwood news of the past several days.

Bert, Sandy's older brother, had added a few lines of his own. "Office running along smoothly in spite of -or could it be because of?-your absence."

Mom Allen, in handwriting as small and neat as herself, concluded the letter: "It's too bad Pop and Bert didn't tell you, but there are now three new traffic lights and some extra guards at those dangerous school crossings. And all because of those illustrated stories you two did last month." She added she was sure they were seeing many wonderful sights, and they must be careful about eating strange foods.

"All she ought to warn you about," Ken told Sandy, as the redhead folded the letter and tucked it into his pocket, "is not to eat too *much* food-strange or otherwise."

George Pappas had gone on into the museum, and when they

looked up, he showed them the three tickets he already held.

"Come on," Sandy said. "I wouldn't lower myself to reply to that last remark of yours even if we had the time."

Once through the museum doorway they found themselves in a broad hall which seemed to stretch ahead of them the full depth of the building. To their left and right were narrower corridors paralleling the front wall.

"This way first," Pappas said, leading them straight forward.

At the far end of the broad hall a wide flight of marble steps rose toward a second floor, branching near its top into two flights, leading left and right.

Statues and display cases stood in the hall itself, and exhibit rooms opened off both sides. Through the first door they passed, on the right, Ken saw a glass case in which a gleaming gold mask was sharply outlined against its black background. He caught his breath. "Isn't that-?" he began.

"Yes." Pappas smiled. "That is the famous gold mask discovered at the site of the ancient city of Mycenae. I know you will want to see that, and the other gold relics unearthed at the same time. But first let me show you my favorite exhibit. It's been on public display only a few months. It's here, in what we call the Jewel Room."

He turned toward the doorway into the last room on the right side of the hall. Most of the visitors to the museum seemed to be in the room beyond that doorway, or on their way in or out of it.

"It's certainly drawing the crowd, whatever it is," Ken commented.

Pappas nodded without speaking, and motioned the boys to follow him. Skillfully he wove his way among the visitors until he stopped at a square of railing in the center of the room. Inside the railing stood a uniformed guard and a glass case.

The case contained a single object—a small, hollow cylinder of softly gleaming gold, about three inches long and less than an inch in diameter. Its entire outer surface was covered with delicate engraving. Sandy bent forward to stare at it. "Hmm," he said. "But what is it?"

Ken was beside him. "Are those hieroglyphics?" he asked Pappas. Then, before Pappas could reply, he added excitedly, "Is this the Golden Key?"

Pappas looked pleased. "So you have heard of it! Yes, this is the wonderful new find made at the excavations of the ancient city of Knossos, on the island of Crete."

"That's a key?" Sandy asked dubiously.

"A possible key to the ancient Cretan language," Ken told him. "I read about it in an archaeological magazine just before we left home. It may turn out to be as important as the Rosetta Stone."

"The what?"

"I'll explain later. Just take a good look, and then we'll make way for the rest of the crowd."

A minute or so later they were following Pappas out of the room.

"You remember about the Rosetta Stone," Ken said to Sandy as they inched their way forward. "It was found in Egypt when Napoleon was there. There were two kinds of ancient Egyptian writing on it-which nobody could read at the time-and some ancient Greek letters too. It occurred to somebody that the stone might carry the same message, in Greek and Egyptian. So a French scholar used his knowledge of ancient Greek to discover the meaning of the Egyptian symbols."

"You mean he broke the code of the hieroglyphics -as it were?"

"Exactly," Ken said. "And if I remember that article correctly, this cylinder is also supposed to have some Greek writing on it, along with some stuff in Cretan, which so far nobody can understand. So the cylinder may help them decipher the hundreds of clay tablets that have been dug up at Knossos."

As Ken finished, they came abreast of Pappas at the door of the room.

"Perhaps it does not look like much," Pappas said to them, "but what you have just seen is the best-loved and perhaps the most valuable relic in Greece."

"You mean everybody is that excited about deciphering an ancient Cretan language?" Sandy asked.

Pappas smiled. "We are excited about that, yes. But our Greek pride is involved too, you see. So many relics of our past are in other countries-in museums in Britain, France, Germany, the United States. That is our own fault, of course. For a long time we Greeks cared very little about such things. Or were too poor to do anything about them if we did care. So foreign archaeologists came and dug things up and took them away."

"The same thing happened in Italy," Ken reminded him. "And in Mexico too. In both places the governments passed laws fairly recently to protect the remains of their ancient civilizations."

"Exactly." Pappas nodded, "Now we too have our laws. And, what is just as important, we have our own archaeologists. The Knossos cylinder has somehow become a symbol to us. Young Greek archaeologists found it, and recognized its importance. We hope that Greek scholars will finally unravel its mystery, although foreign experts are already working on it all over the world, using plaster casts and photographs of the cylinder."

They had been moving back toward the room containing the mask from Mycenae as they talked.

"No wonder it draws such a big crowd," Sandy remarked. "Well, I

certainly hope some Greek-“

A piercing scream cutting through the low murmur of voices in the museum stopped him in midsentence. The sound seemed to come from the Jewel Room, which they had just left. Ken and Sandy and George Pappas all instinctively turned back toward it.

The crowd at the doorway of the room, half facing in one direction, half in the other, had frozen into immobility. A second scream followed the first, and then a third.

Suddenly, from the direction of the main entrance, a flying wedge of uniformed guards appeared-four men using shoulders and elbows, and issuing sharp commands to clear a path for themselves through the crowd. Behind them hurried a white-uniformed nurse, a black bag held before her like a shield.

The next moments were filled with confusion. Ken and Sandy were separated from Pappas as the Greek newspaperman managed to draw closer to the Jewel Room entrance. Finding themselves at the foot of the big marble staircase, they moved up a few steps in order to keep Pappas in sight.

Guards were hastily clearing the Jewel Room, urging the crowd to disperse toward the main entrance or toward the stairs.

As the room emptied, the boys could see a woman lying on the floor near the railed-off case. Another woman sat huddled on a bench nearby. Two more guards hurried up from the direction of the entrance, one of them carrying a rolled-up stretcher.

Ken motioned Sandy to follow. The area just below them had cleared sufficiently for them to make their way through it. Pappas had stood his ground near the Jewel Room door.

“Nothing to be alarmed about, I guess,” Pappas said when they reached him. “They’re saying that the woman on the floor there had an epileptic seizure. A fit, you say? It was the other woman who screamed -the one on the bench. She was just frightened, I think.”

Sandy nodded. “A seizure can be a scary thing to see, if you’ve never seen one before.”

The woman on the floor was being lifted onto the stretcher. Two guards picked her up and carried her through the door. Behind them, two other guards supported the limp figure of the second woman. The final pair of emergency guards followed, one carrying a woman’s purse and a woman’s hat in his hand. Once more, the nurse brought up the rear of the procession.

The crowd made way for them all to pass in the direction of the main entrance.

“There are rest rooms near the outer door,” Pappas explained. “They probably will take them there.”

Slowly the murmuring crowd closed in behind the nurse. People

who had been ordered out of the Jewel Room earlier began to drift back toward it, discussing the excitement among themselves in low voices. Others, apparently reluctant to leave the scene of the brief drama, headed slowly for the stairs and the exhibits on the second floor.

“Well,” Ken said finally, “we were on our way to see the gold mask from Mycenae. Shall we-?”

This time it was he who was interrupted, not by a high-pitched scream, but by a choked cry.

An instant later one of the two guards left in the empty Jewel Room dashed past them, running as if pursued by demons.

Pappas turned swiftly back toward the room. Just as swiftly the remaining guard stepped to the door and barred his entrance.

Pappas addressed an urgent question to him in Greek. The man replied briefly, in a hoarse voice.

“What happened?” Ken whispered.

“He won’t say,” Pappas told him.

With one arm still outstretched across the entrance, the guard was reaching for the heavy door folded back against the wall, obviously intending to shut off the room entirely.

Sandy was peering over the heads of Ken and Pappas.

“The Knossos cylinder!” he cried out suddenly. His eyes were glued to the glass case inside the railing. “It’s gone!”

CHAPTER II

DEAD END IN ATHENS

The hubbub of voices around them fell suddenly silent at Sandy's explosive words. It was as if even people who did not understand English had somehow understood their significance.

Then, almost immediately, another voice uttered a shocked exclamation in Greek. Obviously it was a translation of Sandy's announcement.

For a moment the whole milling crowd in the hall was struck dumb. A split second later it erupted into a bedlam of noise and movement. People surged against the boys and George Pappas in a wave, as those still farther away pushed toward the Jewel Room entrance.

Ken clamped an urgent hand on Pappas' arm, "That woman!" he said quickly. "Her seizure must have been faked! It was a ruse-a diversion to give someone else the chance to get the cylinder!"

A pale and shaken Pappas stared blankly at Ken for the space of a breath. "Of course!" he said finally. "I am sure you are right. The director must be warned, or she will get away before-" Too impatient to finish the sentence, he broke off and turned into the face of the crowd.

Ken and Sandy turned with him. At their backs the guard was still trying to tug the heavy door shut, still ignoring all anxious queries being called out to him.

Pappas had progressed scarcely a yard when an authoritative voice rang out from somewhere in the direction of the front of the museum.

Sandy's height enabled him to see a passageway being opened through the throng. The tall, distinguished-looking man making his way swiftly along it, followed by a trio of museum guards, stopped only when Pappas placed himself squarely in his path.

The quick automatic handshake between the two was proof that Pappas knew the man. The newcomer bent to hear the rapid words the newspaperman spoke into his ear, answered him just as rapidly, and then gave a brief command to one of the guards which sent the man back the way he had come.

The door to the Jewel Room, now open only a scant foot, was held long enough for the tall man and the two remaining guards to slip through. Once they were inside, it was tightly closed.

"The museum director, Spyros Trahos." Pappas was answering the boys' unspoken query.

"I'm glad I'm not that guard who took him the bad news," Sandy

muttered.

“Did you mention to him that that woman-?” Ken began.

Pappas nodded. “The nurse is with her. Now that guard will stay with her too.”

They stood where they were, reluctant to leave the vicinity of the Jewel Room as most of the people in the big hall seemed to be.

A voice loudly amplified by a public-address system suddenly filled the building. It spoke in Greek. Ken and Sandy, watching Pappas’ reaction, saw him nod with approval.

“Good,” the newspaperman said a moment later. “Everything is-as you would say-under control. He announced that something of great value is missing from its place in the museum. He said no one will be permitted to leave the building until the police arrive to take charge.”

The loud voice was speaking again, this time in French. A moment later it repeated in English the same announcement Pappas had already made to the boys. Next it switched to German.

The people in the hall were in motion now, forming groups, whispering among themselves, voicing their excitement at being present during the enactment of a drama. But excitement did not conceal the true concern on almost every face. Judging from their expressions, Ken thought, Pappas certainly was right: the Greeks felt deeply about their Golden Key.

Ken belatedly became aware that Pappas had led them the length of the long hall, and was now turning right, along the narrower corridor that paralleled the front wall. He was about to ask the newspaperman his goal. Then he knew.

“Looking for a phone so you can get out a story?” he said, the words more a statement than a question.

Pappas gave him a wry smile. “You’re your father’s son, I see. Yes,” he went on, “I’m going to get through to my assistant, and have him cable Global and get in touch with the Athens newspaper I sometimes write for. This probably will be one of the biggest stories of my career—since I’m very likely the only reporter in the building. But I’d rather have that little cylinder back in its case, instead.”

Ken and Sandy nodded sympathetically. They had been reporters for fewer years than George Pappas, but they too knew what it felt like to report an event they wished had never occurred.

A moment later Pappas stopped beside a bench near the door leading into one of the museum’s administrative offices. “I know most of the staff. I should be able to borrow a phone without delay. Here, at least, you can sit down.”

“Take your time,” Ken urged him.

“How long we’ll all be kept here by the police, I don’t know,” Pappas added. “I think I can hurry matters along for you. As visitors to

our city, you—

“George,” Sandy broke in, “don’t worry about us. We understand.”

“Of course we do,” Ken said. “You’ve got your job to do, and the police have theirs. We just don’t want to be in your way. Forget about us.”

Minutes later a commotion at the front entrance of the museum caught the boys’ attention. A small army of uniformed policemen was arriving, along with half a dozen men in plain clothes and two uniformed women.

Ken and Sandy had seen a good many policemen at work. They watched with interest the efficiency of this Greek force, acting at the orders of one of the plainclothesmen. Some of the uniformed men made off quickly toward the Jewel Room. Others replaced the museum’s own guards at the front entrance.

The museum director reappeared, spoke briefly to the police head, and took him into an office adjoining the one into which Pappas had gone.

Soon, the public-address system again was flooding the building with sound.

“I hope he makes this speech over again in English too,” Sandy said, “so we’ll know what to do, if anything.”

“We’ll be interrogated and searched,” Ken prophesied. He indicated the policemen carrying tables and chairs into the hall and arranging them in areas they cleared for the purpose. Screens formed cubicles at each table.

“Attention, please, ladies and gentlemen.” The loudspeaker had switched into English. “We are asking the cooperation of everyone in the building in our efforts to recover the valuable object which is now missing. Interrogation centers are being set up, including several for non-Greek-speaking visitors. Will all English-speaking visitors please go to the office of the director at the front of the building on the main floor. An English-speaking officer will interview you there. Thank you.”

“So we can stay right where we are until they’re ready for us,” Sandy said. “I must say,” he went on thoughtfully, “I can’t see the point of questioning everybody, when they must be getting the whole story from that woman right now. She must be willing to talk, once she realizes she’s been found out.”

“I doubt if she knows anything that will help the police,” Ken said, after a moment.

“What?” Sandy straightened up on the bench. “Are you saying you think she really had a seizure and that it was only by some coincidence-?”

Ken was shaking his head. “No, I think she faked that seizure, all

right. But I think she did it without knowing she was providing a cover-up for a robbery.

"Look at it from her point of view," he suggested, as Sandy stared at him in disbelief. "Suppose someone offered you money to fake a seizure so that the cylinder could be stolen during the confusion that would follow. Let's say you have no scruples-that you're willing to take money to help the thieves. But wouldn't you first want to make sure you could safely leave the scene of the crime, so that you wouldn't be implicated in it?"

"Sure," Sandy agreed. "But what makes you think she wasn't sure?"

"She couldn't have been," Ken said. "The more I think of it, the surer I am. The disappearance of the cylinder was bound to be discovered within minutes -maybe even within seconds-after the excitement over her attack died down. She was bound to be still in the building then, under a nurse's care. Her 'seizure' made that inevitable. Once the theft was discovered, she was bound to be suspected of having played a part in it.

"So," Ken concluded, "it seems to me almost certain that she had no idea a robbery was going to be committed. I think she must have been persuaded to stage her 'seizure' by someone who-" He broke off. Pappas was heading toward them.

"My assistant is getting the story out," the man said briefly. "Ken, it is just as you thought," he went on heavily. "That woman did indeed pretend to have an epileptic seizure. She admits that frankly now. But she also insists she had no idea the cylinder was going to be stolen. Her story is that she was hired to play a role for a scene in some sort of a documentary film-the role of a woman stricken by epilepsy, here, this afternoon, in this museum!"

"Well, well!" Sandy murmured under his breath to Ken. "Did you have it figured out about the movie too?"

Before they could ask the newsman further questions, the door of the director's office opened. The police officer standing at the entrance said, "English-speaking visitors will form a line here, please."

"Go," Pappas urged them. "There is no use letting a dozen others get ahead of you. I have already told the police all I know, and have been searched. I will wait for you here."

A sizable group of nervously giggling English schoolgirls was coming along the corridor, shepherded by a flustered teacher. Ken and Sandy crossed the hall in three long strides and presented themselves to the officer in the doorway.

Inside the office, they were first questioned by a scrupulously polite man in plain clothes, who learned from them every detail of what they had seen in and around the Jewel Room. Then a second

official searched them. Finally a third man gave them signed slips to be used as exit permits. He explained that all visitors were being asked to leave the museum immediately upon receiving their permits.

Pappas rose from the bench when he saw them. "You were treated well, I hope?" The boys nodded. "Good. And now I can drop you at your hotel, if you wish. A police car is being sent on an errand and the driver, a friend of mine, has offered me a lift to my office. Your hotel will be on the way."

Well-placed guards watched their passage along the corridor to the main doorway.

"They're making sure nobody hands us anything, now that we've been searched," Ken commented.

A few minutes later the boys were seated on either side of their Greek friend, in a car being driven by a uniformed officer.

"What else can you tell us about the woman?" Ken asked immediately, his curiosity still far from satisfied. "Do you think there's any truth in that story she told about having been hired to act in a movie?"

"Apparently," Pappas said. "She has played small parts before. Her theatrical agent is a well-known and reputable man. He already has corroborated the story. He says a French director came to him, looking for an actress who could play this role, and he called this woman.

"The scene was to be shot from somewhere on the stairs," Pappas went on, "by a cameraman using a small hand camera. This would make him less noticeable to the crowd, they were told-so that the director could catch the actual reaction of the public to the woman's seizure." He shrugged his admission of the story's fantastic quality.

"And who is this French director?" Sandy asked. "Don't tell me he's a well-known reputable character too?"

Pappas shook his head. "The actress and her agent both claim they saw him several times when he came to the agent's office. They supplied the police with a name and address, of course, but both are probably false. At least the name given was unknown at the hotel where he supposedly has been staying.

"They did give excellent descriptions of him, though, along with some other useful data-for example, that he coached the actress himself in how to play the part of an epileptic. He probably has already changed his appearance, however," he added, "so the description may be useless too."

"Does the woman claim he was at the museum today?" Ken wanted to know.

"Oh, yes. She says she saw him in the Jewel Room when she entered it, but didn't see him again later."

"So presumably he himself is the thief, or one of the thieves," Ken

said. "How was that glass case opened, by the way? Was it broken?"

"I understand the lock is a simple one," Pappas said. "Presumably an experienced criminal could open it with a master key. The museum depended on its guards, you see, not on the case itself, as protection."

"Are either of the Jewel Room guards under suspicion?" Sandy wondered. And when Pappas spread his hands in a gesture of ignorance, he added, "And what about the cameraman? The one who was supposed to be shooting that scene from the stairs?"

"Both the woman and the agent claim never to have seen him. The woman was told not to look toward the stairs today; that is, not to look toward the camera that was to be there-and she says she did not. Unless any of the museum visitors report having seen such a person"-he shrugged-"he probably doesn't even exist."

"What an elaborate plan!" Ken said, half to himself.

"But think of the stakes somebody's been playing for!" Sandy pointed out. "The museum probably will be willing to pay a fantastic sum to get the cylinder back."

Pappas' jaw clenched. "Greece is not a rich nation," he said, "but I believe the museum would pay half a million dollars for the return of that particular treasure."

The car was drawing up before the boys' hotel.

"We won't even ask you to stop for a cup of coffee," Ken said as they got out. "You've probably got a lot to do. But can you still have dinner with us tonight?"

"No. I was about to explain. The police commissioner is holding a press conference tonight at eight. By then the search of the museum itself, and the interrogations, will all presumably be over, and he will be able to give the full story to date. So you see-"

"Right," Ken said. "We really wanted to take you to dinner, but otherwise, O.K. We won't starve."

"I know you will not." Pappas smiled for a moment as he drew a notebook from his pocket and tore out a leaf. "Since I cannot take you personally to this excellent restaurant, I have at least arranged for you to be well fed there. Here is the name written in Greek, for you to show your taxi driver. In English it is called the Inn of the Three Brothers, and it is in the Plaka, the old part of the city. I think you will enjoy it.

"A table has been reserved for you, for eight thirty," he added, "and I took the liberty of ordering the meal. If our press conference is short, I will join you there. If not, enjoy your evening, and I will call you tomorrow."

"What can we do with you, George?" Ken demanded. "Really, you didn't have to-"

But Pappas had spoken to the car's driver, and the automobile was

already underway, with the newsman calling through the window: "Don't forget-the Three Brothers at eight thirty. Have a good time."

#

At ten thirty that night the boys finished their second after-dinner cup of coffee.

"If George were coming, he'd surely be here by now," Ken said, taking a deep breath. "He can't expect even you to eat for more than two hours. Shall we go?"

Sandy nodded. "I think I broke my own best record tonight. I'm not sure I can even stand up."

The meal Pappas had ordered for them-and which their waiter assured them had already been charged to the newspaperman's account-had begun with an elaborate variety of cold meats, proceeded through a rich soup, and reached its climax with a huge platter of charcoal-broiled lamb garnished with piles of rice and eggplant. Afterward, there had been a salad, plates of ice cream, and a bowl of huge Greek oranges which were unlike any others the boys had ever tasted.

Before they left, they tried once more to pay the bill. The headwaiter smilingly refused, assuring them he would not dare offend such a good friend as George Pappas by disobeying his instructions.

"Shall I call you a taxi?" the man asked, accompanying them to the door.

"I think we need the walk," Ken told him, grinning.

"You won't get lost? These streets wind and twist a good deal."

"He has a wonderful sense of direction," Ken said, gesturing toward Sandy. "I think we'll manage, thanks."

They started off confidently, striding down the narrow cobblestoned street on which the restaurant's brightly lighted sign seemed out of place.

"That glow in the sky over there comes from Constitution Square," Sandy pointed out. "So all we have to do is head in that direction. Once we're at the square, we know where our hotel is."

The street angled first one way, then another.

"That glow has shifted position," Ken pointed out dryly, after a time.

"I know," Sandy agreed. "Let's take this next side street to the right."

The side street twisted too. As they rounded its third curve they saw the windowless wall of what appeared to be a warehouse, right-angled across their way some fifty feet ahead. A small electric bulb, swinging from a bracket over its lone door, threw their shadows into a grotesque dance on the stones behind them.

"Another turn?" Sandy muttered disgustedly. "Which way is it

going to take us this time?"

Before Ken could answer, they had come close enough to the wall to see that the street did not turn in either direction along it. Instead, it dead-ended at the wall.

"The next time I brag about you-" Ken sighed. "All right. I give up. I've had enough exercise. Let's go back to the restaurant and ask for that taxi after all."

They turned back the way they had come.

Suddenly, when they had taken only a few steps, they saw two figures standing motionless at the corner they were approaching. The dim glow of a feeble street lamp silhouetted the two men against the darkness.

"They look as if they're waiting for somebody," Sandy said quietly. "Could it be us? If they saw us come out of that expensive restaurant-"

"Anybody would look menacing on these narrow streets," Ken pointed out. "We probably look the same way when we stop to try to figure out where we are." But the firm optimism of his words was not matched by his voice.

The men were no longer motionless. They had stepped off the two-foot-wide strip of sidewalk and were moving toward the boys. They came slowly down the center of the cobblestone paving, several feet apart, their faces featureless blurs under flat, peaked caps.

There could no longer be any doubt. Their approach was designed to seal off the cul-de-sac that ended at the warehouse wall-a cul-de-sac from which there was no escape.

CHAPTER III

SOME TIMELY HELP

Ken and Sandy stopped where they were, and sent swift glances over the dark blank faces of the buildings on either side of them.

"We could yell. But I don't think anybody would hear us," Ken muttered.

The two silhouetted figures were only a dozen yards off now, moving more slowly and drawing closer together as they approached. The smaller man carried what appeared to be a club. The other, at least as tall as Sandy and more heavily built, walked crablike, his right shoulder slightly in front of his body, his huge hands knotted into fists at his sides.

Sandy nudged Ken. "Move away from me," he whispered. "That'll make them separate too. If it comes to a fight, take the big one. I'll try to get rid of that club."

"Right. But let's try talking first." As Ken shifted toward the right he called out clearly, "What do you want?"

The smaller man replied, his accent so thick that the one word was barely understandable. "Money!"

"We have very little. Only a few drachmas," Ken called back.

"Tourists always rich!" the man shouted angrily. "We take money, watches, everything! You give-we no hurt. You no give." He raised his club menacingly.

Slowly, as he spoke, the two men were moving closer.

"Before I let anybody take that watch your father gave me-" Sandy began furiously.

"Easy," Ken cautioned. "We don't want a battle. If we can just get past them--"

"You give?" the small man repeated. His club was thrust out now, like a sword. He handled it as if he were well practiced in its use.

"Watch that club and wait for a break," Ken whispered swiftly. Then he called out, "All right! Just a minute." Making his gestures as obvious as possible, he groped in his jacket pockets.

The men stopped, their position still blocking any way past them.

"Here!" Ken snapped the word out. "Come and get it!" His extended right hand offered a black notebook that looked not unlike a wallet in the dim light.

The small man took one step forward, then halted. He turned toward Sandy, as if aware that the big redhead's muscles had tensed for action. "No," he told Ken. "You come. You drop it here." He pointed to the ground at his feet.

“Ready?” Ken’s barely audible question reached Sandy’s ears only a second before the notebook flicked through the air into the smaller man’s face.

That second gave Sandy the time he needed. Even as the man jerked his head to one side, Sandy plunged at him, his right leg coming up in the smooth motion that had so often driven a football half the length of a field. His thick-soled shoe struck the hand that held the club with an impact that ripped the weapon free of the grasping fingers.

Before the wood had clattered to the cobblestones, Ken had moved forward too and was lashing out with a kick aimed at the big man’s knee—a blow that would have crippled his adversary temporarily had it connected. It didn’t. Ken’s foot landed short of its mark, thudding against the shinbone.

The big man uttered a cry of pain and rage and leaped for Ken, arms flailing.

Ken, outweighed and outreached, could only give ground. He protected his head from those ponderous fists by ducking and weaving, and catching the heavy punches on his arms.

Suddenly the smaller man, having lost both his weapon and the use of one hand, was in full retreat. Snarling unintelligibly, he scuttled for the distant corner.

Sandy whirled. “Coming, Ken!” His shout bounced from one side of the narrow street to the other.

He covered the distance to Ken’s hulking opponent in two leaps, and launched himself against him, shoulder first.

The man staggered, but kept his feet. He spun around just in time to catch Sandy’s haymaker flush on the side of his jaw. His head snapped sideways under the jolt. His knees seemed on the point of buckling. Still he didn’t go down. He backed away a step, recovered his balance, and started to advance on Sandy, right shoulder hunched forward as a shield, left arm drawn back ready to lash out.

The first punch he threw—a left jab that Sandy deflected—was the last. From the street corner there came a flurry of shouts and the sound of scuffling. The big man turned to look in that direction, in time to see his partner struggling with a stranger.

With one last feint at Sandy, the man twisted around and raced down the street.

Before either Sandy or Ken could realize exactly what was happening, the big man had sent the stranger staggering to the ground. A moment later he and the small man vanished around the corner, leaving behind only the fading sound of their pounding feet, and a prone figure.

“You all right?” Sandy gulped in air. “You were taking a

pounding.”

“He just hit my arms and shoulders. You didn’t give him time to pin me against that wall.” Ken gestured shakily. “But we’d better go see what they did to our rescuer.”

The man was trying to sit up by the time they reached him. They helped him, one holding each arm.

“Are you hurt?” Ken asked, momentarily forgetting that he might not be understood.

But the stranger answered him in English phrases that were perfectly intelligible though heavily accented.

“No. Thank you. I am all right, I think. I was not struck. Only pushed. That man-the second man-was so much bigger, you see. I was-you say easy? -for him.”

As he half turned toward the corner streetlight the boys saw his face clearly for the first time. He was young-not more than twenty, Ken thought-and built on Ken’s own slim lines. His hair seemed jet black above a thin dark face that was now smiling faintly, as if in apology over not having given a better account of himself.

“We’re certainly glad if you’re all right,” Sandy said.

“I was easy for him too,” Ken assured him. “If my friend here hadn’t hauled him off me, I’d be part way through a wall by now. We’re lucky you came along when you did.”

There were pale smudges on the young man’s dark suit.

Ken pulled out a handkerchief and rubbed them. “I think it’s just dust,” he said. “It seems to be coming off all right.”

“Please do not trouble. It is nothing.” The young man straightened his jacket. “You are tourists?” he asked, as if deliberately introducing a new subject to put an end to their concern.

“Yes,” Sandy said. “Americans. Lost Americans,” he added with a grin. “If you’re a native of this part of Athens, perhaps you’ll understand why we had trouble trying to get to Constitution Square.”

The man’s faint smile broadened. “I am not native to Athens-not to any part of Greece. Permit me to introduce myself.” He bowed slightly. “Antonio Domenico Ragusa, of Salerno, Italy. But I am studying engineering in Athens for three years, and in this time I have learned something of the language, also of the city. So I would be most happy to lead you where you wish to go.”

“Well, what do you know!” Sandy said. “An Italian to the rescue in the heart of Athens. It’s a small world.”

The boys introduced themselves then, explained briefly how they happened to be in Greece, and added that they would not need an escort to the square if Ragusa would instead give them instructions for reaching it.

“But no, please. I myself was walking to the square by a-you say

cut short?-ah, yes, shortcut-when I heard your shouts. So it will be no trouble. We will walk first to that next corner, and then turn to the right. It is not very far to the square, perhaps five minutes only."

They started forward together.

"We'd probably better stop and report that little incident back there to the first policeman we see," Sandy pointed out.

"Ah, excellent!" Ragusa said. "You can tell the police how those men looked? You could"-he hesitated, seeking the word-"identify them? Excellent!" he repeated. "I could not. Everything happened too quickly. But if you can describe them to the police accurately-"

"Come to think of it," Sandy said, "I doubt if I could. They were mostly silhouettes. With the light in my eyes, the way it was, I couldn't see their faces."

"I couldn't either," Ken admitted. "One big man, who walked with one shoulder ahead of the other, and one smaller man. Both in dark clothes, and wearing caps, which of course they could stick in their pockets after they shot around the corner. I don't think I know any more about them than that."

"You would not know them if you saw them again?" Ragusa asked. "Or in police photographs?"

"I certainly couldn't identify them with any certainty," Ken said.

"I know I couldn't," Sandy agreed. "Well-" He took a breath. "So that's that. Neither of us lost anything. Did we?" He looked at Ken. "That wasn't your wallet you threw, was it?"

"No. It was that notebook I bought yesterday. I hadn't written a word in it yet. Look," he added suddenly, "let's just try to forget the past couple of minutes, and go back to the cafe in front of our hotel and spend the money we didn't lose on coffee. O.K.?"

Ragusa looked diffident for a moment. Then he smiled and echoed, "O.K. That would be most pleasant, I think."

Ragusa proved correct about the distance to the heart of the city. Ten minutes later they were seated at one of the tables on the sidewalk in front of their hotel, the Hellenic Palace.

After his first swallow of the sweet rich brew, the young Italian said, "Now I know why you looked familiar to me when I first saw you! I have seen you before-late this afternoon! I walked past this spot just as you were leaving a car here."

"That's right," Sandy agreed. "We did come back to the hotel in a car."

"But-" Ragusa broke off. "I am sorry. I think now I am intruding on important guests of the city. That was a police car in which you were driving, no?"

The boys grinned. "It was," Ken admitted, and told Ragusa where they had been that afternoon and why they had left the museum as

they did.

"Ah! Then you must know more than the papers tell of that dreadful event today! I read what the papers say-and it is nothing!" Ragusa pulled the early edition of the next morning's paper from his pocket and spread it out on the table. "See? But I forget," he went on quickly. "You do not read Greek."

"Tell us what it says," Sandy urged.

The paper added little to the boys' knowledge of the theft of the Knossos cylinder, except for the fact that all air, rail, road, and ship exits from Greece had been put under special surveillance.

"I feel for the Greek people," Ragusa said earnestly. "We Italians also have great regard for our antiquities. Do you know my country?" he asked.

"Not yet," Sandy said. "But when, we leave here day after tomorrow we're taking a little steamer up the Yugoslavian coast and landing at Trieste. From there we go to Venice by train."

"Venice! I think you will much admire that city," Ragusa assured them. "The canals, the museums, the great square of St. Mark's. Also," he added, "most excellent seafood, if it happens you enjoy such eating."

"We very much enjoy it," Sandy assured him. "You know," he said to Ken, "that's one kind of restaurant George hasn't introduced us to. And I thought Greece would be a great place for fish, clams, mussels - all that sort of thing."

"Maybe George doesn't like them," Ken pointed out. "Are there good seafood restaurants here?" he asked Ragusa.

"But of course! Very good. You are free tomorrow?" he added, sounding diffident again. "I would be very pleased to show you such a place."

"The only thing we really have to get done tomorrow is some shopping," Sandy told him. "Presents to take home. Something for my mother and father, and maybe an old weapon of some sort for my brother. Weapons are his hobby."

"Hobby?" Ragusa looked blank, and then smiled in amusement when they explained to him the derivation of the word. "But near the seafood restaurant I speak of are many shops with old things. You could perhaps find your gifts at the same time, no? We could have lunch and--"

"Mr. Ragusa," Ken said firmly, "we've learned there's no way to escape from Greek hospitality. But you're no more Greek than we are. And we don't want to take up your time, unless you enjoy seafood yourself," he said suddenly, realizing that a young student might be grateful for a free meal. "If you'll be our guest," he went on, "I think it sounds like a fine plan. And you'll be doing a great favor to our friend,

George Pappas, who feels he must look after us all the time we are in town.”

Ragusa smiled. “If I say Yes, I will feel that I have invited myself to lunch with you because I have told you of the restaurant. But I have not so many friends in Athens, and I would enjoy it very much, and so I do say Yes.”

“Good.” Sandy signaled the waiter for more coffee, and Ken switched the subject to Italy. Ragusa entertained them with stories of his homeland until they finally separated with a promise to meet the following morning in the Hellenic Palace lobby.

“Quite a day!” Sandy muttered ten minutes later, the words half swallowed in a yawn. “The excitement in the museum, those two thugs, and a brand-new friend from Salerno, of all places!”

“Let’s not tell George about the two thugs,” Ken said as he hung up his jacket. “Men like that probably hang around the restaurants that tourists visit in most cities, just waiting for stupid foreigners like us to get lost in dead-end streets. But George will blame himself for-” The ring of the bedside phone cut him short.

George Pappas was on the other end of the wire. He asked first if they had enjoyed their dinner, and sounded pleased when Ken assured him it could have been improved only by his own company.

“What news did you pick up at the press conference?” Ken asked.

Pappas described the border regulations the boys had already heard of.

“And that’s all?”

Pappas hesitated. “Well,” he said finally, “the police are afraid to do any more. You see-” Again he hesitated.

Sandy had leaned close so that he too could hear. The boys exchanged puzzled glances.

“This must go no further, you understand,” Pappas said. “The press was given the information off the record. But the fact is that Trahos, the museum’s director, had been informed of the theft before that guard brought him the news.”

“What!”

“He received a phone call,” Pappas went on, with a heavy sigh, “from a man who said he had just stolen the Golden Key. If the museum wanted it back, Trahos must let no one know of its loss. If a public outcry was raised, arrangements for a ransom payment would be very difficult. In such a case the cylinder might never be returned.”

Ken whistled softly. “That was fast work. The thieves took it from the case, left with the crowd when the room was emptied, and got outside to make the phone call while the woman was still on the floor in the Jewel Room.”

“And before the guards noticed that the cylinder was missing,”

Sandy added.

"Yes. Trahos was on his way to the Jewel Room to check-to learn if the call had perhaps been a mere hoax-when the guard rushed to him with the news."

"And now all Greece knows about the robbery! What does that do to the chances for the cylinder's recovery, George?"

"I don't know," Pappas said. "It seems to me the police hope to seal Greece off so tightly that the thieves will not try to get the cylinder out of the country. At the same time, I think, the police wish to give them enough freedom of movement here to let them make a ransom offer. There is fear they might be frightened into carrying out their threat to destroy the relic, rather than give it up for nothing or risk capture trying to collect for it."

"If those guards had kept their wits about them," he added, anger sharpening his voice, "and closed the Jewel Room the instant they discovered the loss, all this might have been avoided. Then a ransom might have been arranged almost immediately. The Golden Key might already be back in its place."

Pappas had nothing else to tell them. He sounded so exhausted that Ken urged him to try to forget the whole thing and get a good night's sleep. Pappas insisted that he would take them to dinner the following night, and apologized for the fact that he would be able to spend no time with them until then.

"We're going to have plenty to do-taking our last look at Athens. And maybe buying some souvenirs," Ken assured him. "Now get some sleep, George."

Pappas hung up then, assuring them that he would telephone at five the next afternoon to make plans for dinner.

Ken put down the phone and slumped back on the bed. "Poor George," he muttered. "I suppose because he was right there at the time--"

Sandy was sitting upright on the edge of his bed. "He shouldn't be so hard on those guards," he said abruptly.

"Well, after all," Ken pointed out, "if they hadn't--"

"They aren't responsible," Sandy broke in vehemently. "I've just realized it! I'm the one who looked into that room and yelled that the cylinder was gone! If I'd kept my big mouth shut, the director might have arrived in plenty of time to close off that room before the whole world found out what had happened. But no! I had to go yelling out the news! Me!"

He was glaring at Ken. "Did you hear what I said? I'm the one who made it impossible to arrange a ransom deal. If that cylinder is never returned, I'm the one who should be blamed!"

CHAPTER IV

THE BANDAGED WRIST

Fifteen minutes later Ken was still arguing with Sandy.

"You're being melodramatic," he said. "If you hadn't yelled that the cylinder was gone, somebody else might have. Besides, those people in the hall were going to know that something serious had happened, once they saw one guard running out of there like a scared rabbit and the other trying to close the door."

"But the guards didn't say what the trouble was," Sandy pointed out stubbornly.

"They didn't have to. In another two seconds the rumors would have started, and they would have grown worse the minute the director arrived and sealed off the room. And one of the rumors was bound to be that something had happened to the Golden Key-the Knossos cylinder. People are likely to leap at the worst possible explanation when all they know is that there is a mystery. And in this case they would have been right. So the end result would be the same even if you hadn't opened your mouth."

"But that doesn't excuse me," Sandy muttered.

"You'd never even heard of the Golden Key until today," Ken pointed out.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"I'm just saying the whole situation is one that wouldn't have stirred much interest on your part, if we hadn't happened to be on the spot when the thing disappeared. You know what I think is the matter with you?"

"What's the matter with me?" Sandy snapped.

"Well, don't bite me. It's bothering me too. If a thing like this had happened at home, we'd probably somehow find ourselves in the middle of it. It's a habit we have. We'd be trying to figure out what we could do; how we could use our knowledge of the situation to help the police, for example. And we'd probably be stupid enough to think we *could* help, just because we've had luck a couple of times in the past in things not too different from this.

"But here," Ken went on, raising his voice over Sandy's attempt to speak, "we don't know the language, or the way people's minds work. We can't even find our way from a restaurant to our hotel. So I think we're both feeling somewhat out of place-like kids at a grownup party."

"If I ever heard anything more ridiculous-!"

"You're the one who's ridiculous!" In the back of his mind Ken

knew they had never been closer to a real quarrel than they were at this moment. "All right," he said, aware that he was making matters worse, but unable to stop, "if you really think you're involved in this, then suppose you go to the chief of the Athens police tomorrow and tell him you'll get that cylinder back for him. You can explain that you've had a good deal of experience at crime detection—"

The pillow Sandy hurled at him struck him full in the face.

"Don't be an idiot," Sandy muttered.

Ken threw the pillow back and Sandy caught it. "Let's both stop being idiots and get some sleep," Ken said.

Without speaking to each other they got ready for bed. Sandy turned out his light first.

"Anyway," Ken said, "the cylinder certainly isn't going to be destroyed, no matter what George thinks right now. Anyone smart enough to plan a deal like this is smart enough to keep the thing safe—either on the chance of going through with the ransom plan when the situation cools off; or, at the worst, using it to bargain with in case he's caught."

"Tomorrow's our last day in Athens," Sandy pointed out. "Are you going to keep talking all night, so we won't even be awake to enjoy it? I thought we were going to sleep."

"We are," Ken said. "Good night."

Neither of them mentioned the Knossos cylinder when they got up in the morning. The English-language newspaper was on the breakfast tray the waiter brought up. By mutual consent they ignored it. Ken took his coffee out onto the little balcony that opened off their window, and drank it, staring out over the city's white buildings. Sandy eventually wandered out to join him, remarking that it looked like a fine day.

"Fine," Ken agreed.

When he walked back into the room, four-inch headlines about the Golden Key stared up at him from the paper. Without picking it up he read the story. It contained no information they didn't already know.

"There's nothing new in that," Sandy said, walking in from the balcony.

"So I see."

"Get your camera and let's climb up to the Acropolis for a last look," Ken said. "We can be back in time to meet Ragusa."

"Right. Be ready in five minutes."

They joined the young Italian engineer in the lobby of their hotel a few hours later. Almost immediately he proved to them that he really did know Athens. The shops he took them to were not the fashionable ones on the main streets. They were small, dusty shops, crowded with a hodgepodge of wares, several blocks away from the area frequented

by tourists. Ken and Sandy had explained to him that they would like to buy some old things, but they couldn't afford the prices normally charged for antiques. Ragusa understood.

"In these shops," he said, "things are called secondhand-not antique. But you will find some, I think, really old."

The small, wrinkled owner of the first shop they entered had been reading about the theft of the Golden Key. He spoke of it to Ragusa while the boys peered at the jumble of articles on his shelves. Ragusa translated the remarks for their benefit. "May I tell him," he added, "that you-?"

"Please!" Ken begged him. "Let's forget it! If we don't keep our minds on what we've set out to do today, we'll leave Athens without any presents at all."

"Of course." If Ragusa was surprised at his abruptness, he didn't say so. And if he talked about the Golden Key with the owners of the other shops they wandered in and out of, he didn't try to involve the boys in the discussion.

In the third shop they found a pair of handsome brass candlesticks which they all agreed were undoubtedly quite old. Ragusa seemed almost as pleased as the boys at the find. He bargained skillfully with the shop owner, and the candlesticks were finally theirs for a price lower than they had hoped for.

In the same shop Sandy sighted several old weapons, and they inspected them with Bert's weapon collection in mind. Ragusa asked the price of the musket they admired. He looked shocked as he repeated a figure to the boys. "It is ridiculous, of course," he added.

"Two hundred dollars!" Sandy said. "It sure is."

A moment later Ragusa added, after further discussion with the shop owner, "He refuses to bargain. Perhaps old muskets have suddenly become the fashion, and he thinks he can get that much money from someone."

"If he got it from us," Ken said, grinning, "we'd have to swim home."

They interrupted their shopping expedition to have lunch. It was an excellent lunch, which left them full of energy and determination to find presents for Pop and Bert before the afternoon was over. Ragusa assured them he knew several more likely shops, and that he too was ready to continue the search.

The next place they went into made them feel hopeful. Sandy immediately sighted an old scimitar and a flintlock pistol with an engraved silver butt. Both pieces were dusty, as if no one had touched them in months. But Ragusa reported that the clerk would not let the scimitar go for less than fifty-five dollars, and that the pistol was priced at over a hundred.

The young Italian looked downcast. "I am afraid," he said sadly, "that Athens is not a good place to buy old weapons."

During the discussion Ken had found a Turkish hookah, a water-cooled smoking pipe. "How about this for Pop?"

Sandy admired the water jar encased in brass filigree, and the tobacco bowl on top covered with engraved silver.

"I think it would be great," he agreed. "But at the prices this shop seems to charge we probably couldn't afford even the water for it."

"Perhaps," Ragusa said hopefully, "there is not so much demand for such things as for old weapons." He spoke a few words in Greek to the clerk, and listened to the reply. "Four hundred drachmas," he said. "And I think he may take less."

Ken nodded. "That's a little more in our class!"

"We could manage that," Sandy agreed.

Five minutes later Ragusa had closed the deal at three hundred and twenty drachmas, only a little over ten dollars.

"Well," Sandy said, when they were out on the street once more, "we've found two really great presents. If we don't find a weapon for Bert-well, we don't, that's all."

"Buying antiques is a thing of luck," Ragusa said. "One must be at the right place at the right time. Perhaps we will yet have luck."

They didn't. Two hours later they were all tired and hot. They had looked at half a dozen more weapons, of all types and in all conditions. Every one, even at the end of lengthy discussions between Ragusa and a clerk, was apparently worth a fortune in the eyes of its possessor.

"And I do not know any more shops where such things are for sale," Ragusa said sadly, "except for a few places near the big hotels that handle only the most expensive antiques."

"Let's forget it and wind up the afternoon with a cup of coffee," Sandy suggested.

Ragusa asked if they would be his guests at a sidewalk cafe not far from their hotel. It was noted for a special kind of Greek pastry which he thought they might enjoy. "Being with you today has been for me a great pleasure," he added. "Please let me introduce you to this special pleasure of the city where we have met."

It was impossible to refuse such an invitation. They let Ragusa lead them back to the street on which their own hotel stood. They agreed with him that a table close to the crowded sidewalk would give them the best opportunity of watching the passers-by.

"Sitting here, drinking coffee and eating pastry, looking at the crowds," Ragusa said, as they settled themselves, "we can all be Greeks for half an hour."

"I'm beginning to feel like an old resident already," Ken said. "I

can recognize that sponge peddler a block away.”

Ragusa smiled. “He is here every day, I think. Like the rug peddlers, he is a part of the Athens landscape.”

There was only one rug peddler in sight as he spoke. The man already was approaching them. “You would like to buy a rug?” Ragusa asked the boys.

They shook their heads in unison.

“No rugs. No sponges,” Sandy said. “Even if they are the things everybody seems to buy here.”

The peddler had watched the interchange, but he came closer nevertheless, a brilliantly colored rug displayed over one arm, the rest of his wares bundled under the other.

Ragusa motioned the man away, with a few brusque words in Greek. Instead of leaving, the peddler whisked several strings of amber beads out of a pocket and offered them in place of the rug.

Ragusa glanced at the boys. Again they shook their heads. Again he motioned the man away.

Once more the peddler produced a new item for their view. This time it was a small dagger in a bright-red plastic sheath.

“Now there’s a weapon for Bert!” Sandy laughed.

The peddler turned toward him hopefully. “You like?” he asked. Then he smiled broadly, as if proud of his attempt at English, and tried to put the dagger in Sandy’s hand.

“Sorry,” Sandy muttered to Ragusa. “I didn’t mean to sound really interested.”

“Of course you do not want that,” Ragusa said. “It is”-he had to hesitate until he found the word he wanted-“it is junk.” Once more he motioned the man away.

The peddler tucked the dagger out of sight somewhere in his coat. But he remained stolidly where he was, and withdrew another object from the rugs under his left arm. “You like?” he demanded, and laid it among the tiny cups of coffee the waiter had just served.

“Say!” Sandy bent over it excitedly. It was a scimitar in a leather scabbard.

The leather was black. Its only ornamentation was a brass tip made to protect the sharp point of the curved scimitar inside. Unornamented black leather also wrapped the simple hilt, with its ball-shaped pommel. The hand guard, fastened across the blade just below the hilt, was a strip of steel shaped like a flat letter S.

“It’s nothing fancy, but it certainly looks businesslike,” Sandy went on, fingering the hand guard. “And this leather doesn’t look exactly new. How old is it?”

The peddler looked at him blankly. Ragusa spoke to him in Greek, and listened to a torrent of Greek words in reply.

Ragusa finally turned to the boys. "I'll tell you what he says, but I don't advise you to believe it. He insists this once belonged to a Turkish sultan." He reached for the scimitar. "May I?" Pulling the blade out of the scabbard, he inspected it. Only a few rust spots marred the curved piece of metal. "I don't think any sultan would carry a weapon so free of decoration," he went on, smiling. "But I suspect the Turkish part of his story is correct. I certainly know little of weapons, but my guess is that this belonged to a Turkish cavalryman, perhaps fifty years ago."

He handed it to Sandy, who closed his fingers around the hilt. "Whoever swung this must have been a pretty big man. Or at least a man with a pretty big hand. Look, Ken. Try it."

Ken's fingertips barely met around the leather-covered grip. "Mmm," he muttered.

"Fifty years, you think?" Sandy eyed Ragusa. "Well, we've already discovered we can't afford a really old weapon. What do you think, Ken? Would Bert like it?"

"Well, he doesn't have a scimitar. And that's what this is, even if it isn't an antique." Ken looked at the peddler. "How much?"

Once more the peddler returned a blank stare in reply to a question in English. The two words he had spoken seemed to be the limit of his knowledge of the language.

Ragusa took over. A moment later he winked at the boys. "He says five hundred. But I think he would be very surprised to receive anything like that sum. I'll start with an offer of fifty and see what happens."

The peddler's first reaction to Ragusa's offer was to shake his head angrily and reach for the scimitar. Then he drew his hand back and spoke a few Greek words.

"He's already dropped to four hundred," Ragusa murmured. "I'll go up to seventy-five."

The exchanges went on for several minutes. At each new offer the peddler looked horrified, and appeared ready to walk away. But always he made a new counteroffer instead.

"It's two hundred now," Ragusa said finally, "and this I think is his limit." He smiled at Sandy. "He saw you were pleased when you first looked at it. He thinks you want it. Or I could perhaps get it for one hundred seventy-five."

"I do want it," Sandy admitted. "Don't you, Ken?"

"He insists the scimitar once belonged to a Turkish sultan!"

"Sure," Ken agreed. "And I think two hundred is fair enough."

The scimitar changed hands. The peddler bowed, smiling broadly, and moved off to another table with his wares.

The boys thanked Ragusa warmly for having served as their guide,

and he assured them he had enjoyed the day as a change from his rigorous engineering studies. Before they parted, half an hour later, Ragusa had given them his address in Italy, to which he said he planned soon to return, and the boys had given him their Brentwood address. He promised to make use of it if he ever went to the United States, and they assured him they would look him up if they were ever in Salerno.

It was near five o'clock when the boys unlocked the door of their room and put their three purchases down on one of the beds.

"I want to look at everything again," Sandy said. He pulled off the newspapers that had been wrapped around the awkward shape of the hookah. "This is really something!" he said a moment later. "Did you notice this filigree?"

Ken had walked to the window and was staring at the street below their balcony. He didn't answer.

"Ken! I asked you if you'd really had a good look at this," Sandy said.

"What?" Ken turned around. Even then he didn't cross to the bed to look at the water pipe. "Do you have the feeling you've seen that peddler somewhere before?" he asked suddenly.

Sandy looked up, surprised. "I hadn't thought about it. But we've probably passed him on the street half a dozen times. Why?"

"I don't mean seeing him casually like that. I don't even mean seeing him as a peddler."

"What are you talking about?"

Ken grinned a little sheepishly. "Well, it may be my imagination, but each time he said those few words in English, I thought his voice sounded like the voice of the little man last night-the one with the club. That's why I tried to get him to say something else."

"And he wouldn't oblige." Sandy grinned. "How could he, since those were obviously the only two English words he knows? I think you're dreaming," he added. "He sounded to me like a peddler, that's all."

"But wouldn't you think a peddler who makes a living selling to tourists might know a few more words than that? Might at least know how to tell English-speaking tourists, for example, how much a thing cost?"

Sandy's grin faded. "That's a thought! He couldn't have done business with us if Ragusa hadn't been there, could he?"

A blank look came over his face. Carefully he put the hookah down on the bed and got to his feet. "You know," he said slowly, "you may have something! Last night when I kicked the club out of that man's right hand, my foot landed on his wrist."

"Well?"

“Well, each time that peddler today pretended to reach out for the scimitar and take it away, I noticed his right wrist was bandaged.”

CHAPTER V

THE S. S. ISTRIA

“Well, what do you know!” Ken said softly, after a minute. “That clinches it, so far as I’m concerned.”

“And now that I really think about his voice, it did sound like that voice yelling for our money and stuff last night,” Sandy said. “Why didn’t you mention this while we had him in sight?” he added suddenly. “If you’d told Ragusa and me about it there at the table—”

“I thought of it,” Ken said. “But I kept watching you, and obviously neither of you had any suspicion of him at all. And of course the bandaged wrist didn’t mean anything to me then.” He shook his head in wonder. “He’s certainly got plenty of nerve, peddling his wares today to the same people he tried to hold up less than twenty-four hours ago.”

“He sure has,” Sandy agreed. “And he must have recognized us—or you and me, at any rate. He didn’t have the light in his eyes last night, the way we did. He must have seen us perfectly clearly. What shall we do about him?” he demanded.

The phone rang before Ken could answer. It was George Pappas, to make arrangements for the evening. He suggested picking them up at their hotel shortly before seven.

Ken said they would be waiting. “Any news?” he asked then.

Pappas knew, without being told, what the question referred to. “Not a word,” he answered. “Why, after taking such a risk, the thief doesn’t try to collect for it, I—” He broke off. “But my anger does not entertain you, and it accomplishes nothing. Tonight we will have a pleasant evening together, and we will not even mention a certain relic of ancient Greece. I will be with you soon.”

“Not a word of news,” Ken reported to Sandy. “And he says we won’t even talk about it tonight. As to our peddler friend,” he went on after a minute, “I’m not sure there is anything we can do about him. Not if we want to get on that boat tomorrow.”

“You mean we should just forget about him?”

“Well,” Ken said, stretching out on the bed, “let’s say we go to the police, just the two of us. We can’t find Ragusa and take him along; the only address we have for him is the one of his home in Italy. If we go right now, and wait around until somebody is available who speaks English, and tell our story, we certainly wouldn’t get back here in time to meet George.

“We decided last night we didn’t want to mention the incident to George. So I suppose we don’t want to tell him about it now, and ask

him to go to the police with us tonight. And if we try to manage the whole thing tomorrow, before we sail." He shrugged. "I just don't know. It isn't as if we could get another boat later in the day. We'd have to wait a week for the next sailing. And that's obviously silly, since nothing was stolen from us last night, anyway."

Sandy thought over Ken's remarks for some time. Finally he said, "You're right. We can't wait a week for another boat; we couldn't afford the time or the money. And, as you say, they didn't get anything, anyway. In fact"-he grinned faintly-"I've got to admit the only thing that little man did to us was to sell us something we'd been looking for all afternoon. At a decent price too, thanks to Ragusa."

They let the matter rest there, because neither could think of any further suggestion on the subject. They spent the time before Pappas' arrival showering and dressing, and making a start at packing for their departure from Athens the next day.

Pappas looked tired, but he was determinedly cheerful. He saw their purchases ranged on the table as soon as he came in, and wanted to know where they had done their shopping.

"We bought the scimitar from a peddler right here near the hotel," Sandy told him, "and the other two at a couple of little shops in the old quarter."

Pappas studied the candlesticks. "Very nice, those," he said. "And your hookah is handsome. You are either very lucky or very clever to have found such things in the old quarter when you are still strangers here."

"We're lucky," Ken told him, "but only because we happened to get into conversation with a young Italian engineering student last night, and he offered to go shopping with us today. He's lived here three years, and knows his way around." Then, quickly, so that Pappas would not inquire how they had met Ragusa, he reported the prices they had paid, and asked the newspaperman if they had been cheated.

"No. I would say most certainly not," Pappas said. He gave an amused glance toward the scimitar in its plain scabbard. "I know nothing of such things," he said, "but I would guess it was a fair bargain. And the other two would surely have cost you far more at one of the tourist shops near the square."

Then he suggested that they start for the restaurant. "I don't want to hurry you," he said apologetically, "but I left word with my assistant that I would be there if something should come up and he needs to reach me."

"We're ready," Sandy assured him. "For food I am always ready."

The restaurant Pappas took them to was a small place, with none of the elegance of the one the boys had visited the night before. Even before Pappas could explain why he had chosen it, the boys guessed

his reason from the appearance and manner of the men already seated at its tables.

“Newspapermen,” Ken said, as they sat down.

Pappas nodded, smiling. “I thought you would feel at home here. This is where your father and I always eat when he’s in Athens. The last time ...” His voice trailed off and the boys followed his gaze to a young man standing near the entrance.

Almost instantly the young man caught Pappas’ eye and came toward them. Pappas got up and went to meet him. They talked for a moment or two. Then the assistant turned and left as rapidly as he had come.

The boys knew Pappas had had good news from the look on his face.

“The break has come!” the newspaperman said, pulling out his chair. He was smiling. His eyes were bright with excitement. He bent over the table toward them. “The museum director has received word that the cylinder is safe, and that he will receive another letter tomorrow, stating the amount of the ransom and the method of making payment.”

“And the police are sure the letter is genuine?” Ken asked. “What evidence did the writer offer?”

“The best possible evidence,” he said. “With the letter came a photograph of the cylinder lying on a copy of this morning’s newspaper—a really ingenious way of proving that the letter writer had the cylinder in his possession today.”

The boys nodded, both smiling as broadly as Pappas himself. Ken flicked a wink at Sandy, a signal that said, “O.K. Now you can stop feeling guilty and we can forget all that stuff we went through last night.” Sandy’s wry grin was answer enough.

Aloud, Ken agreed with Pappas. “Very ingenious. But it was obvious from the start the theft was brilliantly planned.”

“I am hungry for the first time all day,” Pappas announced. “Look! The whole mood of this room is changing as the news gets around.”

Men leaned from table to table, passing on word of the important development in Athens’ biggest mystery. New smiles broke out every moment.

“When newsmen look like that about news they can’t even print,” Pappas said quietly, “you know how they feel about that little golden cylinder.”

“Oh!” Ken said. “So it’s not for publication?”

Pappas’ gesture took in the other men in the room. “We all gave our word, at last night’s press conference, to publish only the developments that the police officially release. They promised to keep us informed of everything, but all of what is told to us is not to appear

in print until the cylinder is recovered.” He grinned suddenly. “I said we would not speak of this tonight, did I not?”

“We’re certainly glad you did-and that the good news arrived while we were here to know about it,” Sandy said.

“And now,” Pappas said, “we will really enjoy our last evening together.”

Pappas went along the next morning in the taxi that took them the few miles out of Athens to its port city of Piraeus. He stood by, looking apologetic, as the boys and their luggage were twice searched by expert hands.

“Stop looking so glum, George,” Ken told him quietly. “You know we don’t mind this sort of thing, especially now that we know it’s a formality more or less. The only reason you might have for looking sad today would be if you thought there was still any danger of the cylinder being taken out of Greece.”

Pappas smiled. “That is true. Then I would indeed have reason to be sad. But I do not like your last contact in Greece to be one of such a suspicious nature.”

“Don’t worry,” Sandy told him.

“Nothing could spoil this country for us,” Ken added. “As soon as we get home we’ll start saving money toward another visit. But don’t forget, we’ll expect you in Brentwood before that happens.”

It was ten o’clock when they said their good-bys to him at the foot of the gangplank, watched him stride off, and turn for a last wave. Then they went aboard the neat little S.S. *Istria*.

A burly young man greeted them when, they reached the narrow deck. The battered blue cap set aslant on his head was the only thing he wore that could be described as even slightly nautical. His brown suit might have belonged to a clerk.

“Good morning. Welcome aboard.” His smile and his handshake were both warm. He pointed to himself, making it clear that he needed gestures to extend his limited English. “First mate. Gregory Papalich.” Then he pointed to them. “Your names, please?”

Ken told him, and produced their tickets and their passports.

Papalich checked off their names on a list he took from his pocket. “I show you your cabin?” he offered.

“Please,” Ken said.

He and Sandy had studied a plan of the little ship back in New York when they had booked passage on her. Most of her space, they had learned, was given over to cargo, and she had only eight staterooms-four on each side of the ship, each four opening off a corridor that ran forward from the dining room.

Papalich led them along the narrow deck and through a door into a pleasant lounge. A short flight of steps led down from the lounge

into a room of similar size.

"Dining room," Papalich explained unnecessarily, gesturing toward tables covered with white cloths. Brilliant orange flowers-Mom Allen called them calendulas, Ken remembered-stood stiffly in glass tumblers on each table.

A white-coated man, appeared in a doorway that obviously led to the kitchen. "Steward," Papalich said. "Michael Marmantova. You call Mike." He smiled his warm smile again. "You no speak Slovenian?"

The boys shook their heads.

They went on shaking them as the first mate said, "Greek? Italian? German?"

"Only English, I'm afraid," Ken said. "And a little French and Spanish."

Papalich grinned cheerfully. "Do not worry. You wish to speak to man of crew, you tell me or captain what you wish speak. Only we two speak little English-very little," he added. "But passengers! There is no trouble. On this trip is English-speaking passengers."

Then he led the way briskly through a door on the right forward side of the dining room into a corridor. Just inside the corridor he stopped beside a glass-fronted box fastened to the wall. Four hooks screwed into the back of the box held four large brass keys.

Papalich opened the loosely latched door and took down the key on which the number eight had been engraved.

"All keys here," he explained. "You lock door, you put key here. You understand? Too heavy to carry." He hefted it to show its weight.

It occurred to Ken that if they could reach in for their own key, anybody else could reach in for it too. The officer sensed his thought.

"Nobody on ship steal," he assured them earnestly.

Ken grinned. "I'm sure you're right. I think it's a fine arrangement."

Papalich used the key to open the first of the four doors in the corridor-the one nearest the dining room. Then he stood aside and gestured to them to enter.

A moment later Ken understood why Papalich himself had not gone ahead into the cabin. It was extremely small, barely large enough to take a pair of double bunks at right angles to each other. One pair was opposite the door, parallel to the corridor. A porthole made a round circle of light in the narrow space above the upper bunk. The other pair of bunks filled the wall to the left of the door. The small washbowl was just inside the door to the right.

Sandy put down the bag he was carrying and straightened up. His red hair came within inches of the ceiling. When he stretched out his arms he could almost reach from the door to the porthole.

"Four people sometimes use this cabin?" he asked Papalich,

grinning.

Papalich grinned right back. "On Adriatic coast, much to see on deck. Use cabin for sleeping only. Plenty room here for four sleeping. For two-much extra room." He eased his way in, picked up their luggage, and lifted each bag to one of the top bunks. "See? Here much room for bags." He pointed to the lower bunks. "There-room for sleep."

"Sure," Ken said. "It's fine. Lots of room."

Papalich squeezed past them to the door again. He pointed forward along the corridor. "Shower rooms," he said, then added proudly, "Much hot water. All day."

"Fine," Ken repeated.

Papalich hesitated, as if mentally checking over the items to be told arriving passengers. Then he nodded. "O.K.? After ship sail you meet captain. His name Anton Primich. O.K.?"

"Fine," Ken said again. And Sandy echoed him. "Fine. And thanks for everything."

Papalich took one step away from the door and then turned back. "Deck chairs topside," he said. "Sunbaths very good." He bent his head back and closed his eyes in illustration. "Yes. Very good." Then he disappeared.

"I have a feeling this is going to be a great trip," Sandy said, "if First Mate Papalich is a sample of the crew." While he spoke he was opening his bag and lifting out a pile of shirts. He turned with them in his hand and looked around the room. "There isn't even a bureau in here!"

"How could there be?" Ken asked him. "Where would they put it? You heard Mr. Papalich. The top bunks supply plenty of space for baggage. What anybody would do with their baggage if there were four people in here, I certainly don't know. But obviously we're not going to have any trouble. We just leave our stuff in our bags and reach in for whatever we want."

"Yes. I guess so." Sandy turned back with his shirts. "Well, in that case," he decided, "I'm going to take some stuff out of here and leave it loose on the bunk. Then I'll be able to find things I need a lot faster." He lifted out the scimitar and the candlesticks and put them on the bunk. "There! Now if I keep all shirts and socks on this side ..."

"Good idea." Following his example Ken took the bulky hookah out of his own bag and stowed it carefully in one corner of the bunk. His bag, in front of it, would prevent it from rolling off if the ship pitched. "There are some hooks on the back of the door," he noticed, "and a couple of hangers. We can put our jackets there."

Suddenly the little ship shook with the violence of her whistle. The sound was still dying away when the deck beneath their feet began to

vibrate gently.

“We’re moving!” Sandy said.

Ken grinned at him. “Next stop Yugoslavia!”

CHAPTER VI

THE EVIDENCE THAT VANISHED

"Not really," a woman's voice said decisively at their backs.

Ken and Sandy swung toward the doorway. The woman smiling in at them was short and stocky, and wearing what Mom Allen called sensible traveling clothes—a suit of some soft brown material and flat-heeled walking shoes. Her brown beret obviously had been chosen for its practicality, and not because it was becoming to the square face under the short gray curls.

"I'm Sylvia Burton," she went on, before the boys could speak. "Fellow passenger. Just thought you'd want to know that we'll probably stop at several small Greek ports before we enter Yugoslavian waters. At any rate, that's what the *Istria* did when I sailed on her once before."

"Oh. I see. Thanks very much. They did tell us in New York that she just sort of wandered up the coast and stopped wherever she had to take on or discharge cargo. But the first port on the printed itinerary they gave us was Bar, in Yugoslavia." Then, belatedly, Ken added, "Sorry. My name's Ken Holt. And this is Sandy Allen."

"How do you do?" Sylvia Burton nodded. "Americans."

"That's right." Sandy agreed with what had been a statement, not a question. "We live in New Jersey in a town so small that only its residents ever heard of it."

"And I'm a librarian in a small town in Iowa doomed to the same fate. It's Miss Burton, by the way." She smiled again. "But I mustn't keep you talking here while we sail out of Piraeus and miss our last glimpse of the Acropolis. Come along."

Ken and Sandy agreed afterward that they wouldn't have known how to argue against her suggestion if they had wanted to. Miss Burton's apparent conviction that it was her duty to oversee the well-being of the *Istria's* passengers had an overpowering effect. They found themselves following her meekly to the top deck, where four other passengers had gathered.

Miss Burton already knew their names. She performed the introductions with the efficiency that seemed second nature to her.

The Dubons were a middle-aged Parisian couple, both short and plump and both at home only in their own language. Miss Burton spoke French to them, fluently but with a flat Middle West accent. The other two passengers were men, both apparently in their late thirties. Thornton Wilshire was a Londoner. Robbert Hanson came from New York City.

The *Istria* was moving slowly out of the harbor of Piraeus, past ships docked for loading or unloading, and surrounded by smaller vessels-rowboats, fishing craft, a luxurious yacht or two.

Behind the wharves the city of Piraeus was a curved series of terraces banked with white buildings. Above and beyond Piraeus, separated from the port town by a strip of countryside, was Athens. Miss Burton made certain that everyone spotted the abrupt platformlike mound of the Acropolis, topped by the columned rectangle of its Parthenon.

"Now that we know where we should be looking," she said, "we can go on watching the Acropolis and continue our conversation. We will all be more interested in each other if we know something about one another's occupations. Shall we each tell a little about ourselves in turn?" Her bright smile was a command in itself.

The other passengers submitted good-naturedly. Dubon said he was a civil engineer, returning to France with his wife after a visit to their married daughter in Lebanon. Hanson explained that he was a salesman of packaging machinery. He had just completed a week's work in Greece and was taking the slow coastal trip north because the Milan industrial fair he had to attend was still a week away. The Englishman, Wilshire, turned from the view long enough to say that he wrote detective stories.

Miss Burton prodded the boys into speech last. It was not enough for her to know that they worked for a newspaper. She demanded to know what they wrote and who took photographs. Ken set her straight as briefly as possible.

A moment later Wilshire had moved unobtrusively to stand beside the boys. His narrow face was alive with interest.

"So you do crime reporting!" he said. "I wonder if you'd mind telling me about some of the stories you've covered. I'm always on the hunt for plot ideas. And if you were really involved in some of the situations yourselves, as you hinted-" He shook his head. "On-the-scene color is the hardest sort to come by. That's what I was trying to pick up yesterday in Athens, after that theft of the Knossos cylinder from the museum. But I couldn't learn a thing except what I read in the press, and that wasn't much. You heard about the robbery, I suppose?"

"We were there when it happened," Sandy told him.

"No! What a stroke of luck for me!" He grinned. "That sounds pretty callous, I guess, doesn't it? But-"

Miss Burton's brisk voice broke into their conversation. "You will all miss your last sight of the Acropolis if you keep talking," she said, a slight smile softening the tone of her voice.

"Jove!" Wilshire muttered. "I'm behaving badly. And I'll get you in

trouble with our self-appointed cruise director if I keep you facing in the wrong direction while the Acropolis is still in view.”

They all moved to the rail then, and watched Athens’ memorable skyline disappear into the distance.

A moment later a tall massive man in a blue uniform appeared on the little deck. The gold stripes on his sleeves glinted in the morning sunshine.

“Welcome aboard the *Istria*,” he boomed cheerfully, in heavily accented English. “I am your captain-Captain Primich.”

Miss Burton once more stepped forward to perform the introductions. The captain bowed over her hand and over the hand of Madame Dubon. He shook hands heartily with all the men. Then he spoke a few words in their own language to the French couple.

“He’s just welcoming them to his ship,” Miss Burton informed the others.

The captain heard her. “You speak French also, Miss Burton?” When she nodded, he added, “And other languages also?”

“I know Greek,” she told him.

“Ah? Good. Several of my crew know Greek also. If the rest of you speak English only, Mr. Papalich and I will be always at your service to make understood your wishes to the crew. This is a very small ship,” he went on, smiling, “but we sail only in quiet waters where great size is not necessary for smooth voyage. You will all have good trip, I hope. I think all remain with us for the week, no? For the entire trip to Trieste?”

“That’s right,” Miss Burton told him.

The captain laughed. “You I shall call my second mate,” he said. “You have all information at your finger ends.”

“Fingertips,” Miss Burton corrected, with a smile.

As the captain left them, the young steward named Mike appeared, carrying a deck chair under each arm. Ken and Sandy set them up while he disappeared for more. There was much discussion of the best location for the chairs, a subject on which Miss Burton had definite ideas.

The Dubons were trying out the pair they had chosen, and four other chairs were already in place, when Wilshire said to the boys, “I’m going below now, to try and bring some order into my little chaos of a cabin. Just wanted to say first that I’ve got an envelope full of clippings and other stuff about that museum robbery, including a few things I grabbed up as I raced out of my hotel this morning and haven’t even looked at yet. Would you like to see them? I’m still hoping we can settle down for a talk about that business later on.”

“Thanks,” Ken told him politely. “We’d like very much to see whatever you’ve got. Want us to come down and pick it up?”

“Don’t bother. When it turns up among my things I’ll put it out on one of the tables in the lounge. You can’t fail to see it. It’s a big brown envelope with my name on it.” Wilshire excused himself to the others and disappeared.

“I suppose we all ought to do what unpacking we plan to do, and get properly settled in,” Miss Burton said. “It is so lovely up here, though, one hates to leave.”

Hanson had stretched out in a deck chair, his face turned up to the bright sun. “The way I figure it,” he said, “we have a whole week to unpack in. And no place to put anything, anyway. So why bother?”

Miss Burton looked as if she were about to call him to task for laziness, when something caught her eye. “Oh, look!” she commanded the others, pointing forward. “A fleet of caiques!”

“Of what?” Hanson asked.

“Caiques,” she repeated. “Greek fishing boats.”

“Oh. I’ve seen fishing boats before. Not worth getting up for,” Hanson decided.

Ken and Sandy needed no prodding to watch the little sailing vessels, still some distance away, several with bright-red sails that glowed against the brilliant blue of the sea.

“I wonder what that island is over there,” Miss Burton was murmuring a few moments later, just as Sandy decided to go below for his camera to photograph the caiques.

“That reminds me,” Ken said. “Somewhere in my bag is a map of Greece that George gave us, so we could identify the islands in these waters. Think I’ll go below with you and look for it.”

The boys were crossing the lounge toward the stairs leading down to the cabin deck when Ken spotted an envelope lying on one of the tables.

“Go ahead,” he muttered to Sandy. “I’ll see if that’s the stuff Mr. Wilshire was talking about. I suppose we ought to glance through it, whatever it is.”

When Sandy returned through the lounge with his camera, Ken was leafing through the newspapers and other materials he had taken from the envelope.

“Most of this is ordinary tourist stuff about Athens itself,” he told Sandy. “Plus yesterday’s and today’s newspapers. I don’t think there’s anything we haven’t already seen.”

“Didn’t see how there could be,” Sandy said, and was on his way to the upper deck in a rush, to catch the caiques while they were still in sight.

Ken put the papers back into the envelope five minutes later and joined Sandy.

The Dubons were on their way below. They nodded to him as they

passed.

"Did you find it?" Miss Burton asked.

It was a moment before Ken realized that she was speaking to him. He looked at her blankly.

"The map," Miss Burton said patiently, as if he were one of the youngest borrowers in her library. "Your friend Sandy said you were going to look for-"

She broke off when she saw Ken shaking his head. "Ill-uh-try after lunch," Ken said. "It's probably down in the very bottom of my bag. I'll have to take everything out and-"

Miss Burton smiled forgivingly. "I'm just as glad you didn't," she said. "I couldn't have resisted staying up here and trying to identify every tiniest island we pass, if we had your map to help us. And I really should go down and have a little rest before lunch. Doctor's orders, you know. I'm still recuperating from a bout of pneumonia and should rest *every* day, before lunch and before dinner." She waved to them and disappeared.

"I wonder how bossy she gets when she has her full strength," Sandy murmured, focusing once more on the little fleet of caiques now falling astern of the *Istria*.

Hanson was hoisting his long, lean body out of his deck chair. "Miss Burton has given me an idea," he said, yawning. "I never could sleep in these chairs. I had only about three hours' sleep last night. Guess I'll go get a little shut-eye before lunch too." He ambled off.

"I could have sworn I saw that map right on the top of your bag when you were shutting it this morning," Sandy said. "You couldn't find it any place?"

"I didn't look for it," Ken said. He was glancing cautiously around to make sure they were alone.

"You didn't-!" Sandy had taken his last shot of the caiques. He stared at Ken as he fastened his camera case. "But-"

"*In* that envelope of Wilshire's," Ken said, interrupting him, "there's a copy of an Athens newspaper for today, one of the things Wilshire hasn't had a chance to look at himself yet, I imagine. It's an English-language sheet, one we've never seen before. Real yellow journalism. Mostly gossip columns. But there's a story about the robbery in it, along with a picture described as 'obtained exclusively by our special correspondent.'"

"Get to the point," Sandy said. "What kind of picture?"

"It's supposed to be an artist's reconstruction, drawn from a detailed verbal description. You know the sort of thing police artists sometimes turn out when they don't have a photograph of some wanted person. This is supposed to be a drawing of the alleged French movie director who hired that actress to play the part of an epileptic."

“Well, what do you know?” Sandy said. “Do you think the paper got it from the police? Because it sounds like one of those things the police wouldn’t want to have published now, while they’re trying to get the thieves to carry on with the ransom negotiations.”

“I shouldn’t think they’d want it published, either,” Ken agreed. “Whether the paper actually got it from the police or not, I don’t know. Maybe they wangled it illegally. The paper looks like the sort of outfit that would stoop to almost anything. The caption under the picture is pretty vague,” he went on quickly, before Sandy could interrupt. “It gives the impression that the paper’s own artist made the drawing after an exclusive interview with the actress herself. But that’s not the point right now.”

“It’s gone!” Ken said. “That newspaper is missing!”

“I’ll bet the police think it’s the point,” Sandy said. “From what George told us-“

“Wait a minute,” Ken told him. “Just listen. It’s the drawing itself that’s important. Erase the moustache from it, and maybe add a little more hair, and it would look almost exactly like Monsieur Dubon-the Frenchman here on this ship.”

Sandy’s jaw dropped. “You’re kidding! How could Dubon be the thief? In the first place what would the thief be doing on this ship, when he’s supposed to be in Athens arranging-?”

Ken brushed that aside. “He could be leaving those arrangements to his confederates, and getting quietly out of the country in the meantime.”

“Well, I suppose that’s possible. But if Dubon is really-!”

“Take it easy,” Ken cautioned. “Maybe you won’t agree with me at all when you see it. I want you to take a look. I’m sorry I even told you what I thought. If you looked at it cold, and reached the same conclusion-come on.”

They made their way to the lounge. The envelope still lay where Ken had left it some minutes before. The room was empty except for themselves.

Ken unwound the string that held the envelope flap in place. He reached inside and brought out the whole sheaf of material.

“Funny,” he muttered. “I thought I left it right on top of the pile.” He glanced into the envelope to make sure he had removed everything. Then, hastily, he spread all the newspapers, clippings, folders, and leaflets on the table.

“It’s gone!” he said a moment later. “That newspaper is missing!”

CHAPTER VII

A MESSAGE IS SENT

"Are you sure?" Sandy said. "Here's a newspaper. And here's another one."

Ken shook his head dazedly. "No, it's not either of those. It's not here, I tell you."

"But if it was here just a couple of minutes ago-You're right, though," Sandy added slowly. "We've seen all of these before. And none of them is even the kind of paper you described."

Suddenly Ken gathered up all the materials and stuffed them back into their envelope. "Let's go down to our cabin where we can talk," he muttered.

Sandy locked their door with its oversized key to guard against interruptions by a room steward or a friendly passenger.

"All right," he said then, sitting down on his bunk and bending almost double to avoid striking his head against the upper one. "What do we do now-if anything?"

Ken perched on his own bunk. "The captain represents authority on a ship. If we suspect there's a criminal on board we should report it to him."

"Yes, but-" Sandy agreed, when Ken halted. "Is your interpretation of that picture enough to go on? That's the question. Of course," he added suddenly, "there's also the fact that the picture has mysteriously disappeared. That's suspicious in itself."

Ken grinned wryly. "The captain might take that as proof that I dreamed up the picture in the first place. After all, he's not going to be automatically delighted at the thought that there's a thief on the *Istria*. He's not going to believe it without some pretty good evidence."

Sandy looked up so suddenly that he cracked his head on the upper berth. "Ouch!" he said. "What I was going to say was," he went on, rubbing his crown gingerly, "that maybe Wilshire saw the picture too. If you both-"

Ken was shaking his head. "In the first place, he said he'd put some things in that envelope this morning without looking at them. This was a morning paper, so he probably never looked at it at all. But if he did, he apparently didn't notice the resemblance to Dubon, in which case I might have been wrong about it too, or-" He stopped and shrugged. "In either case, Wilshire couldn't back me up now, with the picture gone."

"I've got it!" Sandy said. "Let's tell George the whole story. He probably could arrange for somebody from the police to come aboard

the *Istria* and have a look.”

“But this is a Yugoslavian ship,” Ken reminded him. “A Greek policeman can’t come aboard and interrogate a passenger who is, in effect, on Yugoslavian territory.”

“You forget,” Sandy reminded him. “Miss Know-It-All Burton says we’ll be stopping at some Greek ports before we get into Yugoslavian waters. And if my long years of legal training do not mislead me, a Yugoslavian ship in a Greek port is under Greek authority.”

“I bow to your long years of legal training,” Ken said. “I’d forgotten about the possibility of stopping somewhere in Greece. I think we should report the incident to George Pappas,” he said, nodding. “I studied that picture pretty carefully, and took another look at Dubon after I’d seen it. I certainly can’t swear to the identification, but I do think it’s worth passing the word on to the police.”

“There is, of course, just one slight snag,” Sandy said slowly. “There’s no radiotelephone on this ship. And if we try to send a radiogram, the operator will know what’s in the message-and this is not exactly the sort of secret we want bandied around.”

Ken grinned. “Miss Know-It-All Burton is the solution. She speaks Greek, remember? So if we go ashore at a Greek port, we can ask her to put through a telephone call to Athens for us. Once she gets Global on the line, we can carry on from there, and speak to George directly.” He sat in thoughtful silence for a moment.

“Right! That will do it! Unless, of course,” he added, “George isn’t in when we call. Which is likely to be the case. He’s not the kind of newspaperman who sits around and waits for stories to be brought in to him on a platter. And that assistant of his doesn’t know enough English to be able to understand us. Why didn’t we ever learn Greek ourselves?” he muttered disgustedly.

“Hold it,” Ken said. “There’s a way around that. First, we can find out if he’s expected soon and try him again if we’re going to be in port long enough. If that’s no good, we’ll just have to leave a message-some sort of cryptic message that only George will understand.

“We’ll have to relay the message through Miss Burton, if it’s got to be in Greek. But we’ll have to figure out something that won’t arouse her curiosity too much, and that will let George know what we mean.”

“Sounds like a great idea, mastermind,” Sandy said skeptically. “But just what would that message be?”

Ken had found a pencil and a piece of paper in his pocket. “O.K. So it’s impossible. And the impossible takes a little longer. Give me a minute.” He scribbled several words, crossed out most of them, and then scribbled again. Suddenly he crumpled the paper up and threw it out the porthole.

"It's simple," he announced. "We'll give the impression that the call is just a friendly gesture—that we want our friend to know we're enjoying the *Istria*, because he's the one who recommended it to us. Then, if we can't talk to George, we'll just tell her to leave word that we're having a fine time. And to add, as if it were a joke, that we even solved the puzzle in today's *Clarion*."

Sandy said, "Now you've got me puzzled. Oh! I get it! *Clarion* is the name of that paper."

"Right. George must see all the dailies, good and bad. He'll get our point immediately. But no librarian would buy a paper like that, so Miss Burton won't know whether the *Clarion* carries puzzles or not. And we won't even have to add anything about where to reach us. George will know how to find out where the *Istria* is quick enough, by phoning the steamship line."

The luncheon gong sounded loudly outside their door.

"You think we should tell Wilshire there's a newspaper missing out of his envelope?" Sandy asked as they took turns at the small washbowl.

Ken shrugged. "I don't know. If he doesn't miss it, it's probably just as well to let the whole thing go, rather than have him go around looking for it and asking people if they've seen it. After all, if that picture is of Dubon, and if Dubon himself took it out of the envelope—well, I'd rather he didn't think anybody was curious about it *or* about him. I'd hate to have George arrange for a policeman to come look at Dubon, and then not have Dubon here when he arrives."

Just before they left their cabin, Ken said, "Let's find out as soon as we can if we really are going to stop at a Greek port, and when."

Sandy grinned. "Don't worry. Miss Burton probably will serve the information up to us with the soup."

Ken paused, his hand on the key. "Do you think we're all going to have to eat at one table? I'm not going to feel very comfortable sitting with the Dubons, when—"

Sandy shrugged. "Who knows what Miss Burton has arranged? Whatever it is, I suppose we'll have to agree to it."

Arranging for all the passengers to sit at one large table was exactly what Miss Burton was attempting when the boys entered the dining room. She had already persuaded Mike, the young steward, to pull two adjoining tables close together, and she was inviting the Dubons to join her.

"Come on, boys," she said. "There's room for all of us here."

But the Dubons were shaking their heads and explaining something in swift French that the boys couldn't follow.

Miss Burton looked disappointed, but she smiled at them. Monsieur Dubon bowed, and led his wife to a small table some distance away.

"They say they speak so little English that they prefer to sit alone," she told the boys. "Since the rest of us—Ah, Mr. Wilshire! You'll join us, won't you?"

The Englishman had just entered with a book under his arm.

"Sorry," he said politely. "Wouldn't want you to think I don't enjoy the company on this boat, but the fact is I always read with my meals, so I make a practice of having a table to myself."

"Of course. I do understand. And you mustn't, any of you, let me run things," Miss Burton said surprisingly. "It's a dreadful habit of mine. Comes from operating my library singlehanded for nearly twenty years, I suppose. You must just be firm with me, and not let me impose on you. I suppose you two boys would prefer to be alone too. You don't want to be stuck with an old gray-haired lady like me."

Ken and Sandy exchanged a swift glance. Her unexpected words had transformed the busybody into a vulnerable human being.

Ken said, "We see more than enough of each other at home. We'd much rather join you, if you don't mind."

"This table right here would be fine for the three of us, don't you think?" Sandy said, indicating one just beneath a porthole.

"Think it'll take four?" The hearty new voice belonged to Hanson, who had just come in. "I'm the sociable type. Always prefer any company to my own."

The captain and his first mate came into the dining room while they were all eating their soup, and took a small table which Mike had in readiness for them. He explained that they would soon be going through the narrow rock cut known as the Corinth Canal and that about six that evening they would tie up briefly at Aiyion, a small Greek port on the Gulf of Corinth.

"Let's phone George from there," Ken suggested to Sandy, with seeming casualness. "He's a newspaper friend of ours in Athens," he explained to the others. "And since he suggested this trip to us, we'd like to let him know how much we're enjoying the *Istria*."

"You're braver than I am," Hanson said. "I tried to make a phone call in Athens and gave up. Had to get the hotel clerk to put it through for me. The operator even tried to help me out by speaking French, but that's Greek to me too." He laughed cheerfully at his own feeble joke.

Ken looked disappointed. "I guess our French wouldn't be up to it, either. And our Greek is nonexistent. Oh, well—"

"But I'd be glad to put a call through for you," Miss Burton offered.

"Would you?" Ken said gratefully. "That would be swell!"

Miss Burton seemed pleased at this testimony to her usefulness. She was a pleasant companion during the meal, chatting informally about some of the towns at which the *Istria* would probably stop, and

outlining the long history of the Corinth Canal.

"But I must be boring you," she interrupted herself once, apologetically.

"No, honestly you're not," Ken told her truthfully. Both he and Sandy had an insatiable curiosity, and they found the librarian's discourse interesting if a little overwhelming. It also helped them not to stare at the Dubons, eating the same meal only a few yards away.

Hanson refused coffee and left the table first. Miss Burton went to her cabin after lunch. When the boys walked through the lounge on their way to the upper deck they found Wilshire there, just shoving his materials back into the brown envelope.

"Did you have a chance to look through this?" the Englishman asked. They nodded. "Now that I've seen for myself what's here, I realize there's nothing that would be new to you. I say," he hurried on, "would you really tell me what it was like in the museum the other day when the theft was discovered? You must know the sort of thing I could use-how the crowd behaved, just how the police managed the searches and the interrogations-all the human-interest details."

"We'd be glad to," Ken told him. They could give Wilshire what he was asking for without mentioning the off-the-record information George Pappas had given them. And it would relieve the guilty conscience both he and Sandy had for not mentioning to Wilshire the missing paper-a fact the Englishman himself apparently was unaware of.

The passage between the high rock walls of the Corinth Canal was full of interest. Wilshire was a good listener as they talked. The afternoon passed quickly.

Shortly after the early shipboard dinner, the *Istria* veered shoreward through the quiet waters of the Gulf of Corinth. A few minutes later her hawsers were being made fast beside a small stone-paved wharf. Beyond it stood a handful of low white buildings.

The captain arranged with a uniformed guard for his passengers to be permitted a stroll on shore, in spite of the fact that they had all officially cleared Greek customs earlier that day.

Miss Burton joined the boys on deck as the gangplank was let down. "The captain tells me there is a public telephone in the customhouse. Shall we make your call right away?"

The phone was in a bare concrete-floored corridor. Miss Burton approached it confidently, put on her glasses, and looked at the business card Ken gave her which carried George's name and the Global office number.

"If George isn't in," Ken told her, "and won't be back fairly soon, would you just leave word for him that we're having a fine time? Oh,

yes"-he laughed -"and you might say we've even solved the puzzle in today's *Clarion*. George knows that sort of thing makes a day perfect for us," he added, when Miss Burton seemed to look at him rather oddly.

"Of course." She smiled. "So you love puzzles too? So do I. Now let's see ..." She looked at the card again, and turned to the telephone. Soon she was speaking her flat-accented Greek to an operator, and then to another person.

The conversation went on for a minute or two. Ken guessed what she was going to tell them before she turned. "I'm so sorry," she said sympathetically as she hung up. "But your friend wasn't in. His assistant doesn't expect him until after nine, and we'll have sailed by then. So I gave him the message-that you are enjoying the *Istria*. And I remembered to add about the puzzle too."

"Thanks very much." Ken and Sandy both said the words.

"It's too bad we weren't able to talk to George," Ken added, "but at least this way hell know we're grateful to him for suggesting a trip we can already see is going to be fascinating."

"Is the *Clarion* an Athens paper?" Miss Burton asked.

Her question went unanswered.

"There you are!" Hanson's voice was echoing down the hall from the doorway. "Anybody join me for a stroll?"

For half an hour all four of them walked back and forth on the wharf. Wilshire joined them after a time. The Dubons remained on deck. With the others the boys watched crates of big Greek oranges being swung over the side into the hold, and dozens of huge bundles of uncured sheepskins being hoisted aboard.

"Oh, dear!" Miss Burton murmured when she saw the skins. "I hope those are unloaded at the very next port, before they begin to smell. There is nothing more rankly odorous than uncured sheep pelts."

All the passengers retired to their cabins early that night, within an hour or so after the *Istria* left the little port. The captain had told them that they would tie up again in the morning at Preveza, another Greek port, and there was general agreement to breakfast early so that they could be on deck for the always interesting moment of docking.

The *Istria* nosed up against the Preveza wharf shortly after eight thirty. A row of trucks piled with orange crates awaited her. Before the captain bustled off toward the customhouse, he once more made arrangements for his passengers to leave the ship and explore what seemed to be a sizable town.

Ken and Sandy had been the first at the rail, pretending deep interest in the first mate's banter with the local longshoremen he was hiring to help load the fruit.

“What are you expecting to happen?” Sandy murmured.

“I don’t exactly know,” Ken admitted. “I guess, without even realizing it, I expected George to be waiting for us here, with a plainclothesman. I sort of took for granted George would come along, on the chance of a big story. But there doesn’t seem to be anybody around who looks like police-not to mention George.”

The Dubons passed them, with polite nods and smiles.

“Don’t tell me they’re taking off!” Sandy groaned under his breath.

But the French couple simply made their way carefully down the slanting gangplank, to pace solemnly up and down the long quay.

Miss Burton came by next. Sandy had his camera at hand, to be used as an excuse if necessary. He meant to say that he wanted pictures of the loading before going off for a walk. But Miss Burton didn’t force them to invent excuses for not joining her.

“This morning I’m going to have a *brisk* walk,” she announced, and a moment later had crossed the quay and disappeared into one of Preveza’s narrow streets.

Ken and Sandy moved up to the top deck in time to avoid Hanson and Wilshire, who set off shortly afterward, each on his own, for a stroll through the little port.

“If nothing happens pretty soon,” Ken said at the end of half an hour, “I say we try to find Miss Burton and see if she’ll put through another call for us. Maybe-“

“Look,” Sandy interrupted him. “Here comes somebody.”

A stocky, dark-faced man of medium height, wearing unmistakably city clothes and carrying a small flight bag as his only luggage, was striding over the quay toward the *Istria*. Ken and Sandy were standing near the head of the gangplank a moment later when he came aboard.

The stranger glanced quickly around, as if to make certain no one else was within earshot. Then he came close to the boys and said quietly, “Holt? Allen?” His Greek accent made their names almost unrecognizable. The boys nodded.

“Yurgos,” the man said, indicating himself. He handed them his wallet opened to disclose a badge and an identification photo.

“Police,” he said.

CHAPTER VIII

IN PROFESSIONAL HANDS

"We're certainly glad to see you," Ken said, shaking hands as Yurgos slipped his wallet back into his pocket.

Yurgos smiled briefly. "And I am glad to meet those whose clever message to George Pappas brings me here. He sends you his greetings," he added parenthetically, "and wishes me to say that if another—important development takes place here on the *Istria*, you will obtain the facts for him and Global News."

"We thought maybe George would come along with you," Sandy told him.

Yurgos shook his head. "My superiors want this investigation to be carried on as quietly as possible. After all, the identification is not yet complete, shall we say?"

"Of course it isn't," Ken agreed readily. "And you may decide we've brought you out here on a wild-goose chase. For nothing, that is," he added, when Yurgos seemed puzzled by his last phrase.

"As to that, I can understand why you did so. The man you wish to have investigated is the one now walking there on the quay, no? I have seen him as I came to the ship. He does indeed fit closely the description given to us."

"He does?" Ken said. "Well, that's something, anyhow."

"And now," Yurgos said briskly, "you will please tell me all you have noted about this man since you first saw him, also about the other passengers too, especially any who seem to know Monsieur Dubon. But first let us all lean over the rail, so that we will appear to be watching the men at work below."

As soon as the three took their positions at the rail, Yurgos continued, "I am here on board, you will understand, as an ordinary passenger. My papers show me to be a business agent going to Yugoslavia to buy lumber and cement. Even the captain will know me in that role, unless it becomes necessary for me to reveal myself. I am sure I can count on your discretion, and your cooperation if necessary."

The boys nodded. Sandy pointed his camera at the quay, as he had been doing earlier.

"Good," Yurgos commended him. "As a new passenger I have paused to chat with you, that is how we must seem."

"We understand," Ken assured him.

"And now, if you please, let me have what you know. Everything."

"It isn't much," Ken began. Speaking quietly, and as if he were

engaged in casual conversation with a stranger, he told Yurgos how the Dubons had behaved during the past twenty-four hours. It sounded innocent enough, as he told it. But Yurgos seemed satisfied.

"Yes, I see," the man murmured once or twice. "They keep much to themselves, then," he summed up when Ken had finished. "Yes. That would seem to be in character."

He stood in thoughtful silence for a moment, then said, "I have obtained the cabin next to theirs. With luck I should soon be learning more about them, to add to the information we hope to receive from the French police.

"Yes-" he nodded, in answer to Ken's questioning glance-"we have already sent a query to Paris. If I could be sure they would remain down there on the quay for some time, I might even be able to make a preliminary search of their cabin this morning. Would they be likely to walk into the village with you, if you suggested it?"

"Well-" Ken hesitated. "Of course our French-"

At that moment they saw the Dubons halt in their slow stroll. Madame Dubon seemed to be in sudden pain. Her husband spoke to her solicitously, then bent down and touched her ankle. Even at the distance of a hundred yards or so, the three at the rail could see her wince.

Then the Dubons started slowly back toward the ship, Madame Dubon leaning heavily on her husband's arm.

"Bad luck!" Yurgos murmured. "Very well. We must accept it. Remember, we are casual acquaintances of only a few moments. You will do from now on what you might be expected to do."

Yurgos and the boys all went down the gangplank to offer their assistance to Madame Dubon. Yurgos understood the Frenchman's explanation that his wife had twisted her ankle, and he was taking her to their cabin to lie down. Introducing himself quickly, Yurgos said he too was on his way to his cabin and would be glad if he could be of service. Dubon thanked them all, and addressing the boys in halting English, said that they needed no help.

"Then you can be off for your walk as you planned," Yurgos said to the boys. He added, politely that he was glad to have met them and looked forward to seeing more of them during the voyage. Then he hurried on ahead to open the door of the lounge for the Dubons.

Ken and Sandy waited until they had all disappeared.

"The idea is to act naturally," Ken remarked. "And he's right, of course. We'd be expected to take a walk at this point. So come on."

"What do you think of him?" Sandy asked, as they moved across the quay.

"He seems to know his business," Ken said. "He certainly doesn't waste any time getting down to things."

Sandy nodded his agreement.

Fifteen minutes later, in the middle of the pleasant friendly little city, they ran into Miss Burton as she was bargaining for a cowbell in a crowded ironmonger's shop. She saw them through the dusty window and waved to them. They joined her inside.

Before Miss Burton had concluded her purchase, Wilshire came along, and they all agreed to join forces for further exploration of Preveza, and lunch in one of the local restaurants. Hanson happened along about one o'clock as they were trying to decide between two small eating places, and added himself to the party.

The Dubons and Yurgos were in deck chairs when the group returned to the ship in midafternoon. Miss Burton climbed to the top deck to inquire about Madame Dubon's ankle, which the boys had told her about, and the others trailed along. The Frenchwoman smiled at their expressions of sympathy and assured them it pained her very little now if she did not move around too much.

Her husband introduced the new passenger, first in French to Miss Burton and then in his halting English to Wilshire and Hanson.

"Monsieur Yurgos has been most kind," Dubon said. "First he help Madame to our cabin. Then he help her up here."

Yurgos acknowledged the public expression of gratitude with convincing casualness. He had slipped skillfully into the role he had told the boys he would play.

"Enjoy your walk?" he asked Ken and Sandy.

"Very much. It's a pleasant town," Ken said.

"Had a good lunch too," Sandy added.

"And I bought a cowbell with a really wonderful tone. Listen." Miss Burton took her purchase out of her capacious handbag and shook it to set its clapper clanging against the metal. "It's a present for a friend who lives in the country. Don't you think she'll be pleased?"

To everyone's surprise Monsieur Dubon spoke again in English, as if he and his wife had decided to emerge from the privacy they had maintained more or less consistently since they came aboard.

"I, too, have such a bell," he said. "Also for country home. Our home. You would enjoy to see? I buy in Athens."

"Of course," Miss Burton assured him. "We can compare tones."

"I got some nice things in Athens," Wilshire said. "A good-looking copper coffeepot. And a hookah."

"We bought a hookah there too," Sandy said.

"Did you? I say," Wilshire went on, "what would you say to a general display of our souvenirs? Eh? We're getting ready to take off, I see. Once we're underway, we might ask that boy, Mike, to serve our tea up here on deck. In the meantime, we can all go below and bring up the stuff we've been buying."

"I'm on a business trip," Hanson said. "I haven't been buying souvenirs. Come to think of it, though, I did pick up a handsome pair of embroidered slippers in Athens."

"You see?" Wilshire grinned. "We'll have quite a bazaar!" He made a mock bow to Miss Burton. "And if you have more things than you can carry up alone, I'd be glad to serve as your porter."

"Well, I haven't," Miss Burton said decisively. "And I'm not sure any of us would really enjoy displaying some of our mistakes. Most souvenirs do turn out to be mistakes, don't you think?" She appealed to the others.

Ken was surprised. Usually Miss Burton took the lead in just such sociable activities as Wilshire was suggesting. Then it occurred to him that perhaps she hadn't been able to afford souvenirs that would compare with the purchases of the others. In that case, he thought, it would be rude to insist on the general display. But it was too late to stop it now.

"But the more mistaken we've been, the more we'll amuse each other," Wilshire said. "Come along, Miss Burton."

Dubon, smiling, was speaking quickly to his wife in French. Then he said in English, "I will bring my bell. Other things also."

"Come on, Ken," Sandy said. "Let's get our loot."

"Oh, dear!" Miss Burton murmured. "Well, if you insist upon parading our imbecilities ..."

Ten minutes later the *Istria* was easing away from the Preveza wharf, and her upper deck had taken on the look of a combined general store and antique shop. The Dubons had spread out several needlework articles, an old copper coffee grinder, candlesticks, and many strings of beads. Hanson's embroidered slippers were brilliantly colorful. Wilshire's hookah and coffeepot were surrounded by the jumble of his other purchases—handwoven tablecloths and mats, more beads, a pair of candlesticks. Miss Burton, as Ken had suspected, contributed only a few items—gay beads and several embroidered caps selected, she said, for her nieces and nephews.

"Now look at that!" Wilshire said admiringly. "Not an imbecility in the lot. What's your opinion, Mr. Yurgos?"

"Very interesting," Yurgos said pleasantly. "Very interesting."

Dubon rang his bell and Miss Burton's together, and declared hers far superior. Next, he set about lining up the three pairs of candlesticks, and comparing their workmanship and possible age. Wilshire was studying the differences between his hookah and the one the boys had bought for Pop.

"Look at this thing!" Hanson said admiringly, and picked up the boys' scimitar.

Captain Primich's massive figure suddenly appeared in their midst.

He boomed with laughter at the sight of the display. "You are starting a market?"

Then he caught sight of the scimitar in Hanson's hand. "Ah, Mr. Hanson! You have bought the blade of a sultan?"

"It belongs to them," Hanson said, indicating the boys.

"Does it really look like a sultan's scimitar, Captain?" Sandy asked. "The peddler who sold it to us said it was, but of course we didn't believe him."

The captain took the weapon from Hanson. "I was making the joke," he said. "Of weapons like this I know nothing. But it means business, no?" As he spoke, he pulled the blade from its scabbard and slashed through the air with it.

"Please! Captain!" Miss Burton had shrunk back in her chair. "That terrifies me!"

"Ah, Miss Burton!" The captain sheathed the blade quickly. "I am sorry-most sorry. I do not mean to frighten you." As if to prove his good intentions he put the scimitar on the deck among the other things.

"I suppose it's silly of me." Miss Burton was smiling at him. "But all weapons alarm me, even a child's toy gun."

Wilshire had reached for the scimitar. "Don't be alarmed, Miss Burton," he said, before he picked it up. "I won't brandish it at anybody. I'm just interested in old weapons."

"We're not sure it's even old," Ken told him.

Wilshire grinned. "Well, I doubt this ever belonged to a sultan. It looks too workmanlike-it has too little glitter-for that. Still, it's your scimitar, and I guess you can call it a sultan's scimitar if you like. But he must have been a big fellow, whoever he was, to have got his hand around this hilt comfortably."

He examined the hilt more closely. "This thing doesn't look as if it belonged to the rest of the blade," he murmured. He fingered the round pommel at its end. "Never saw one like that before. Usually the hilt ends in a sharp curve, which of course serves to keep the hand from slipping off when the blade is swung, just as this ball would do."

"Do put that dreadful thing down, Mr. Wilshire," Miss Burton said. This time she was clearly trying to speak calmly, but her voice still betrayed her fright.

"Here is the man who can tell you of weapons," the captain said, as his first mate appeared. "Mr. Papalich, your advice is needed. Mr. Wilshire here believes the hilt of this scimitar is not the original. What do you say?"

"Hah! A Turkish scimitar!" Papalich exclaimed.

"A Turkish cavalry weapon, about fifty years old, I'd say," Wilshire said, handing it to him. "Holt and Allen, there, bought it in Athens.

But look at that hilt! Surely it's not authentic. A weapon like this ought to have--"

Papalich was shaking his head apologetically. "That I do not know. The captain gives me credit for the knowledge of my grandfather in Split. He is famous weapons expert. I take you and your scimitar to him when we reach Split, yes?"

"That would be great," Sandy said. "We bought it for my brother, and we'd like to be able to tell him something about it. But if your grandfather is an expert," he added diffidently, "we probably shouldn't bother him about a thing that can't possibly have much value."

"He will enjoy," Papalich said firmly. "Always he like to look *at* weapons. And not only to look, to fix also. If this"-he touched the scimitar's hilt-"not right, he can give you better one perhaps. He take this one off, you see, and put on better one. No? This would please you?"

"That's an offer I'd take advantage of," Wilshire assured the boys. "And I'll come along, if you don't mind, just for the pleasure of seeing a real expert examine this."

The captain and his mate returned to the bridge. The others settled down to the tea Mike brought, and to relating accounts of how they had found their various purchases and what they had paid for them.

The boys managed to stay behind on deck with Yurgos when the others gathered up their things and went below to get ready for dinner.

"We didn't have a chance to ask you earlier," Ken said quietly to the man, "but was there any fresh news about the Knossos cylinder before you left Athens? A new note about the ransom, or anything? This morning's radio news bulletin didn't say."

"Nothing," Yurgos told them briefly. "A second note was expected, but none arrived."

"Were you able to learn anything on board here today?" Sandy asked. "About the Dubons?"

"Nothing," Yurgos said again. "If Madame Dubon really hurt her ankle, it is unfortunate for her-and for me. If she did not, they are perhaps more clever even than we thought." He sprang up out of his chair and walked to the rail and back. "But tomorrow, when we come to Bar, I must make the chance to search their cabin. You must persuade them to leave the ship. You can do this, you think?"

"We'll try," Ken said hesitantly. "But we've never seen them as-well, friendly-as they were today. They may not feel that way again tomorrow."

"Maybe they were feeling relaxed because we're finally leaving Greek waters," Sandy said. "And if so, they may be even less on guard

tomorrow.”

“Anyway,” Ken said, “we’ll do our best to get them off the ship.”

“Please.” Yurgos spoke solemnly. “It is most important.”

The *Istria’s* passengers were at breakfast the following day as the little ship nosed her way toward the harbor of Bar.

“This time it is really true,” Miss Burton told the boys cheerfully. “Next stop Yugoslavia!”

They grinned at her. It seemed a long time since she had overheard Ken making that announcement as the ship pulled out of Piraeus.

“Now in this town,” she went on, in her brisk manner, “the thing we must see is the ruin of a Turkish fort. We’ll have to take a bus to the top of the mountain behind Bar. It will be most interesting. You’ll all come? Mr. Hanson? Mr. Wilshire?”

The two men nodded, Wilshire first and Hanson following his lead as if he cared little about the plan one way or the other.

“Mr. Yurgos?”

“Unfortunately I must do business in Bar,” Yurgos told her, with every appearance of regret.

“What a pity! But the rest of you will come?” She saw Dubon nod to his wife. “Good! And you boys too? Then it is all settled. Let us be ready to leave as soon as the boat docks.”

Fifteen minutes later the boys came up from their cabin to find Miss Burton, Hanson, and Wilshire waiting for them at the head of the gangplank.

“Madame Dubon has decided that the trip would be too exhausting for her-with her bad ankle,” Miss Burton said. “So we shall just have to go without them. Come along!” She led the way toward the quay, the two men at her heels.

Ken and Sandy exchanged grim looks. Neither of them had been attracted by Miss Burton’s description of the ruined fort, but they had felt they should go along to ensure the Dubons remaining ashore as long as possible.

“We can’t back out now!” Sandy muttered disgustedly.

Yurgos suddenly appeared behind them. “I heard,” he told them. “The stubborn Dubons remain aboard! Perhaps they will at least walk on the quay for a time, as they did yesterday. Then I may still get my chance.”

“We’re sorry,” Ken said. “We thought-“

“I know.” Yurgos nodded. “It is not your fault. Join the others now. I do not wish to leave with your party. Say I have returned to my cabin for some papers if anyone is curious.”

Obediently Ken and Sandy loped down the gangplank. When they caught up with the others, in the middle of the quay, they found them talking with the captain.

"But it is a dusty pile of stones-that old fort!" the genial officer was saying. "Who would wish to see it? And when there is a most delightful beach only five minutes from here!" He gestured toward his right.

"Captain!" Miss Burton chided him. "Those ruins are historically interesting."

"You say there is a beach close by?" Sandy asked.

Once more he and Ken exchanged looks, but this time there was a new light in their eyes.

"Miss Burton," Sandy said firmly, "we're going to skip the history today. Anybody else for swimming?" He grinned as the captain clapped him on the shoulder before hurrying on his way.

"But the fort-" Miss Burton began.

"Come on, Miss Burton," Wilshire said firmly. "You take her other arm, Hanson. Go along, you two. Have your juvenile fun," he told the boys. "We will return to the *Istria* educated. You will have nothing but sunburn."

Miss Burton was still trying to convince the boys to join them, but the two men walked her firmly toward a waiting bus.

"What a break!" Sandy said. "If that beach is really just five minutes away, maybe we can convince the Dubons to go along there with us."

They ran up the gangplank. "I'll go to the cabin and get our swim trunks," Sandy said, when they reached the deck. "You go look for the Dubons."

Ken went up to the top deck. The chairs there were empty. He tried the lounge and found it empty too. Sandy burst in on him there.

"Haven't found them so far," Ken said.

"Never mind them for a minute," Sandy told him. "Our scimitar is gone!"

CHAPTER IX

A SUSPICION DISPELLED

Ken stared at Sandy, repeating his words blankly. "What do you mean, 'Our scimitar is gone'?"

"I mean it's gone! It's not there."

"You must be dreaming," Ken told him.

"I am not dreaming," Sandy said hotly. "I've looked everywhere for it. And that cabin is not exactly the size of Versailles Palace, you know. You could hardly lose a needle in there, let alone a thing as big as that."

Ken grinned. "Maybe *I* couldn't," he said. "But I've heard you accuse me of borrowing a tie of yours when it was right there on the rack in front of you—close enough to bite you if it had teeth."

"All right," Sandy said. "You find it then."

In half a minute they stood at the door of their cabin. Sandy had the big key in his hand. He unlocked the door and shut it behind them when they were inside.

"When we went down to the cabin right after breakfast I put it on the lower bunk," Sandy said. "I was shifting things around in my bag looking for film. When I came down for our swim trunks just now it was gone."

"But the room was made up after breakfast," Ken reminded him. "Probably the steward put it up on the top bunk to get it out of the way."

"I looked up there," Sandy assured him.

"Then maybe it slipped down between the mattress and the wall before the steward noticed it. Come on. Give me a hand. We'll look."

Together, they leaned into the bunk, took hold of the mattress at its far side, and bent it upward.

"It couldn't have slid down here—there's not enough room," Sandy muttered. "See? I told you. Nothing."

Ken got down on his knees and peered under the bunk, pulling out the life vests that were stored there and feeling into the dark area with outstretched arm.

Then he stood up and examined the upper bunk, moving Sandy's bag and various other articles while Sandy repeated patiently, "I looked there. And I looked on your bunk, and on the one above it. And there's no place else to look."

"Well, I'll just look again," Ken said. He turned to the bunk above his own bed, pulling forward the bag that held the hookah snugly in place against the bulkhead.

“See?” Ken said, pointing. The scimitar lay beside the hookah.

Sandy glared at it, his jaw tightening. “It wasn’t there when I looked before. All right. Go ahead and laugh. I might overlook one tie in a rackful of ties once in a while. But I couldn’t miss that thing!”

“Of course,” Ken said in a mock soothing voice. “The scimitar obviously was stolen following the time we came down here right after breakfast. The thief thought it was really a sultan’s scimitar, you see. Then he discovered it wasn’t—that it was not encrusted with precious jewels—so he returned it in disgust.”

Sandy answered Ken’s deliberate nonsense in dead seriousness. “He returned it while I was upstairs telling you it was gone?”

“That’s right. He’s not very bright, you see. He didn’t notice at first that it was not laden with rubies and—”

“But he couldn’t have gotten in here then,” Sandy interrupted. “I locked the door when I went up to look for you, and took the key along.”

Ken burst out laughing. “Of course nobody returned the thing then, you idiot! Because nobody ever took it in the first place. It was here all along. You just didn’t—All right, all right!” he interrupted himself hastily, at sight of the look on Sandy’s face. “But what’s the point of continuing this discussion? Think what you want about the scimitar. Only let’s forget it now and go see if we can find the Dubons and lure them to the beach. Or is a non-stolen scimitar more important than the stolen Knossos cylinder?”

Sandy grinned reluctantly. “O.K.,” he agreed. “Let’s go. But you’ll never convince me that thing was here when I looked for it a couple of minutes ago.”

“Don’t worry,” Ken assured him, returning his grin. “I won’t even try to. You just go on believing in your little disappearing-scimitar mystery if it makes you happy.”

To their surprise they found the Dubons at the head of the gangplank, looking as if they might have been discussing the possibility of a walk on shore.

Ken told them of the beach the captain had recommended, emphasizing its nearness.

“If it would not be too long a walk for Madame Dubon,” Ken concluded, “we thought maybe you would join us.”

The Dubons consulted briefly in their own language, and then agreed with what appeared to be real pleasure. They delayed the boys only long enough for Dubon to go down to their cabin for books and a parasol. Then they all set off with the cheerful good wishes of the first mate, who was standing beside an open hatch supervising the unloading of the sheepskins.

Madame Dubon wrinkled her nose at the smell.

“We are lucky they are leaving the ship,” Ken said, and she nodded, obviously aware of his meaning without having understood all the words.

Conversation was not easy at first. But the trip to the beach lasted only the five minutes the captain had promised, and the beach itself was pleasant, equipped with a bathhouse, a small restaurant, and a chair-rental service.

The boys helped Monsieur Dubon set up two chairs, then excused themselves and went to the bathhouse to get into their trunks. When they came out they saw that the French couple seemed happily absorbed in reading. They ran to the water and plunged in.

For a long time they swam and dived, resting at intervals on a raft moored some distance offshore. The Dubons seemed placid in the shade of the parasol propped above Madame Dubon’s head.

“You know what I wish?” Sandy said finally.

Ken looked at him warily, hoping Sandy was not going to mention once more the disappearance he seemed convinced had occurred that morning. “What?”

“I wish I had a hamburger.”

Ken laughed. “I wouldn’t mind one myself. It must be about time for lunch. Probably the Dubons will be ready to go back. By this time Yurgos has certainly had all the time he needed. Look! They’re waving to us to come in.”

The stubby, dark-suited figure of the Frenchman was standing erect beside his chair, his arm lifted in an unmistakable gesture. Ken and Sandy swam for the shore.

When they joined the Dubons they found, to their surprise, that two additional chairs had been brought and that a table had been set on the sand. Madame Dubon’s eyes twinkled as she pointed to a waiter coming toward them from the restaurant with a huge tray balanced above his head.

“You will do us the pleasure of lunching with us?” Monsieur Dubon asked.

Ken swallowed. Under the circumstances, he hated to accept the Dubons’ hospitality. Sandy looked at him. Obviously he felt uncomfortable too. But the waiter arrived just then and began to set the table for four and to distribute four plates of cold meats and salad.

“Thank you very much,” Ken said. He tried to make his grin natural. “You must have guessed we were getting hungry.”

“Guess?” Dubon smiled. “We know. We have grandsons, you see. They like always to eat.”

The beach picnic was surprisingly gay. Dubon seemed to grow more at ease in English, the more he spoke it. Even his wife tried a few words, and laughed cheerfully at her pronunciation. The boys

experimented with some of the little French they knew, and their hosts taught them the names of various objects within view.

Then, somehow, the conversation touched on the old Turkish fort above Bar, and Dubon suddenly launched into fascinating talk of ancient architecture. Swift sketches in the sand, made with a deft finger, illustrated the points he could not make with words.

When the waiter finally came to remove the coffee cups and the empty pastry plates, everyone realized at once, and with equal amazement, that the afternoon was nearly gone.

Ken and Sandy thanked the Dubons. Their hosts thanked them in turn for what the Frenchman insisted had been "a most agreeable day-most agreeable. Always we are happy with young people," he said. Then he added that he and his wife would start back to the *Istria*, at their own pace, while the boys dressed.

"I kept feeling like a heel," Ken said, getting into his shirt. "And then I'd forget all about it because I was really enjoying myself. I almost wish now I'd never seen that picture-that we'd never called George about it."

"If Dubon really is a thief," Sandy pointed out reasonably, "he ought to be caught. But I agree with you about them. If Yurgos has found anything incriminating in their cabin, I'm going to be pretty surprised."

Yurgos was waiting for them in the lounge. He answered their question with a shake of his head. "I am afraid this has been-what was it you spoke of?-a chase of the wild goose," he went on. "I had enough time to make a most thorough search, and I found nothing suspicious at all. Only letters from grandchildren, journals of the engineering profession, photographs of his daughter's family in Lebanon.

"In Dubrovnik tomorrow I will make contact by telephone with the French police for their report," he went on. "Dubon will remain officially under suspicion until that report is in my hands. But for now-" He spread his hands. "Ah, well," he added, "without these chases of the wild goose an officer like myself could see nothing of the world. So I have you to thank for a pleasant voyage, even if my superiors will say it was not perhaps worth the cost."

"We're certainly sorry to have brought you out here for nothing," Ken said uncomfortably.

"No," Yurgos said quickly. "You must not misunderstand. You did only what all good citizens should do, even though you do not happen to be citizens of Greece. And you had reason. Monsieur Dubon does indeed resemble that picture by coincidence."

"There is the other thing," Ken said. "The picture itself disappearing-that newspaper being gone when I took Sandy down to look at it a minute later. That seemed pretty suspicious too."

Yurgos smiled one of his rare smiles. "And it still does? But did it not occur to you that an innocent man who sees a newspaper picture which closely resembles himself would not wish his fellow passengers to see it, and perhaps to suspect him of some serious crime? Such suspicion would not be pleasant, for him or for his wife."

"No. Of course it wouldn't," Ken said. "I never thought of that! So you think Dubon took it? And for that reason?"

Yurgos was still smiling. "I am sure he took it. I found part of that paper-the picture itself had apparently been destroyed-wrapped around the candlesticks they were showing us yesterday."

"Oh "Ken said.

"But how did Dubon know the picture was on board?" Sandy wondered.

"There's no problem about that," Ken told him. "Wilshire wasn't whispering when he told us he'd leave the envelope for us in the lounge. Probably Dubon heard him, didn't quite follow his English, and thought he was inviting everyone to look at some photographs that he picked up in Greece. All of us had been there and would naturally be interested. I certainly let a lot of nothing add up to something, didn't I?" he concluded with a disgusted sigh. "I feel as if I ought to go and apologize to the Dubons."

"No!" Yurgos said sharply. "That would be most unnecessary."

"I know," Ken agreed sourly. "I won't really do it. I'd just feel better if I could."

There was a great deal of cheerful banter back and forth among the tables in the dining room that night. The three who had visited the fort tried to pretend that it had been a fascinating trip, but Wilshire finally gave the show away with a burst of laughter. The ride, he confessed, had been hot and dusty, the fort itself a meaningless heap of stones, the restaurant they chose in Bar a disaster. The Dubons countered with an obviously sincere description of the delightful time they had spent on the beach. A little awkwardly the boys joined in with praise of the lunch to which the Dubons had invited them.

Yurgos listened in smiling silence to the general talk. It was Wilshire who finally pulled him into the conversation by asking if his business had been successfully concluded.

"It was most satisfactory," Yurgos said, and for a moment his eyes met Ken's. He was smiling.

After dinner Monsieur Dubon suddenly inquired if there were any chess players on board besides himself. Ken and Sandy admitted to playing. So did Miss Burton and Hanson and Wilshire. Within minutes a tournament was being arranged. Two boards were available-the little traveling board owned by Dubon, and a larger one provided by the steward.

Names were scribbled on strips of paper. Madame Dubon was asked to pull two pairs of strips from a soup bowl.

Her husband and Miss Burton were paired for one game; Hanson and Wilshire for the other.

The players settled down in the lounge, Madame Dubon smilingly watching her husband, the boys wandering back and forth between the two boards. Yurgos had disappeared into his stateroom, with his usual explanation of work to be done.

The *Istria* was still in port. The loading and unloading tasks, which that morning the captain had assured them would be completed by late afternoon, were still going on under lights. The captain's last word was that he would not be able to sail out of Bar until the following morning.

Finally Ken and Sandy went up to the top deck. For a time they leaned over the rail watching men heave crates of fruit out of trucks to longshoremen who carried them up the gangplank.

Then they crossed to the other side of the ship, where more crates were being lifted aboard from a lighter lying low in the water beside the *Istria*. A temporary gangplank had been laid between the lighter and the foredeck of the *Istria*, slanting bridge-like across the catwalk around the lighter.

"I know how the scimitar could have been returned to our room in exactly one minute," Sandy said suddenly.

"What?" Ken blinked at him. "What are you talking about?"

"See the narrow catwalk around the lighter?" Sandy pointed down to the narrow strip of deck that now looked like a deep ditch between the *Istria's* bulkhead and the lighter's superstructure.

"I bet this is how it happened," Sandy went on. "We leave the cabin, somebody sneaks the key out of the case in the hall, opens our door, and gets the scimitar, slips out, locks the door, and returns the key to the case. Then, just a couple of minutes later, he sees us returning to the ship. He's stuck. He hadn't expected us back for hours. He knows we'll discover the scimitar is missing. But it's too late to return it by going through the dining room and into the corridor. We're already almost on top of him. He can't do a thing for the moment."

"Look," Ken said, "must you-?"

"Don't interrupt me," Sandy said. "I've got it all worked out. So I go into the cabin and find the scimitar gone. I go out-lock the door, mind you-and race up to the lounge and tell you about it. While we're talking there, he jumps down onto this lighter, sneaks along the catwalk there, and sticks the scimitar in through our open porthole-probably while we were searching under the mattress of the lower bunk... . See? I knew it was on the lower bunk when I last saw it. But

when he put it through the porthole, he naturally had to leave it on the upper bunk which was the only one he could reach. And that's where you discovered it, making nasty cracks to me all the time."

"Sandy"-Ken turned sideways to stare at his friend-"let's give up, shall we? I pulled one of the great boners of all time, getting Yurgos out here because I thought that picture looked like Dubon. From now on I'm willing to be just a tourist, no big ideas, no mysteries, no detection, no anything but enjoying the trip. How about it?"

"Well-" Sandy hesitated. "After all, the scimitar is back in our hands," he said finally. "And I don't suppose even I will ever be able to discover who borrowed it for a couple of minutes. It could have been one of the sailors, I suppose, who was curious about the scimitar, and who was afraid to admit he'd been in our room while we were out. Or-"

He ducked the fist Ken was aiming threateningly at his jaw.

"All right. I give up. For the rest of the trip we will conceal our identity as those great detectives, Holt and Allen. From now on we are masquerading as tourists, pure and simple."

"Pure and simple," Ken echoed firmly.

They shook hands on it, and went below to see how the chess tournament was progressing.

CHAPTER X

SURPRISE APPEARANCE

Early the following afternoon the *Istria's* passengers stood on the top deck as Dubrovnik came into sight. All morning the views of the rocky, island-dotted coastline had been spectacular, but nothing had quite prepared them for this one.

"It doesn't look real," Sandy muttered, even his camera forgotten as he stared at the medieval city of pale stone surrounded by a many-towered rampart. At the water's edge the great wall rose straight up from the rock cliff on which the city stood, then it curved inland to surround the close tiers of red-roofed buildings crowding the foot of the hill that formed Dubrovnik's backdrop.

The city had obviously long ago outgrown its wall, climbing farther up the hill beyond it. But it was the walled heart of the town that held every eye.

"She rivaled Venice for centuries as queen of the Adriatic," Miss Burton told them, automatically assuming her role of teacher and guide. "That wall is over a thousand years old, and no enemy has ever breached it."

"See that opening at the water's edge?" she said a moment later. "The one guarded by the two big towers? Just imagine the great galleys that used to sail between those towers when that was the port! Now it is only a mooring for small fishing and pleasure boats."

"You mean we don't go in there?" Sandy sounded disappointed.

"Oh, no. We go past Dubrovnik to the modern port of Gruz at the foot of the hill beyond," Miss Burton explained. "When we go ashore we'll go back to Dubrovnik by bus or trolley. Whatever we take though, we'll get off at the city gate. Dubrovnik does not permit any traffic in its streets. Isn't that wonderful? It makes it all seem truly medieval!"

Slowly Dubrovnik fell away behind them, and then the *Istria* was bearing to die right and heading into the port of Gruz. Just ahead of them a big Italian cruise ship had already docked. Her passengers were pouring down the gangplank and across the white plaza beyond the wharves, toward the waiting buses, trolleys, and taxis that would take them to Dubrovnik.

"There won't be anything left for us," Wilshire said.

"It's only a ten-minute ride, or so, into Dubrovnik," Miss Burton assured him. "By the time we're free to go ashore that crowd will be gone."

She was right. A trolley pulled into the Gruz terminus as the

passengers from the *Istria* walked in a body across the plaza. Ken and Sandy managed to fall into step alongside Yurgos, who had kept to his cabin most of the morning and with whom they had not had a single word in private. He had passed customs inspection in the ship's lounge a few minutes before. Now he was carrying the flight bag he had brought aboard the *Istria*.

Ken didn't dare ask a question that couldn't be overheard by the others. The Dubons were only a few feet away.

"You're leaving the ship here, Mr. Yurgos?" he asked.

"I expect to, yes," the Greek answered politely. His own voice, like Ken's, was pitched to a carefully casual tone. "It is possible that my business here will be concluded within a few hours, and if so, I may go on with the *Istria* when she sails tomorrow. But this I doubt." Briefly, his sidewise glance met Ken's.

"I see." Ken realized that Yurgos was merely confirming what he had told Sandy and himself the day before. If the official French police report on Dubon, which he expected to receive in Dubrovnik, gave him no new reason to suspect the Frenchman, then Yurgos would return immediately to Athens.

"Ah, you're leaving us, Yurgos?" Hanson said, coming up alongside and noticing the bag Yurgos was carrying.

Yurgos answered him much as he had the boys, and the two men continued to talk as they all crowded aboard the open trolley. Gay posters on the car were unmistakably announcing the fireworks display and the gala theater performance the captain had told them they could witness in Dubrovnik that night.

Ken and Sandy found themselves sharing one of the cross-car seats with Miss Burton, listening to more of the information which she always seemed to have in such endless store.

The trolley tracks went up a hill so steep that the car seemed in danger of losing its traction and careening back to the bottom. Then it reached more level ground, and finally clanged to a stop in an open square just outside what appeared to be the gate to a moated fortress.

"This is the west gate of Dubrovnik," Miss Burton announced, gesturing with as much pride as if she had designed the picture-postcard view personally for their benefit.

The gate itself was a fairly small arched opening at the base of a squat stone tower. A cannon thrust outward through the opening above it. Once the moat surrounding the inland portion of the wall had been crossed by a drawbridge, whose ancient chains were still in place. On either side of the gate tower stretched the massive wall, rising on the right into a battlemented fortress overlooking the sea.

At lunch that day Miss Burton had explained to her fellow passengers that the best way to explore Dubrovnik was to climb to the

top of its wall, right inside the gate, and follow the walk there as far as the tower guarding the ancient port on the opposite side of the city.

Now, taking for granted they would follow her lead, Miss Burton crossed the bridge over the moat and entered the gate. On the far side of the tower she turned left, into a narrow alleyway that brought them to the foot of a flight of stairs. The attendant there sold them tickets, and they mounted to the paved walk protected by its own shoulder-high rampart. They found themselves moving back across the tower beneath which they had just entered, and on toward the seaward half of the city.

The rampart on their right was pierced by bowmens' slits. Soon, through those slits, sounded the roar of the surf pounding against the rock far below.

On their left spread the complex pattern of Dubrovnik's tiled roofs. Occasionally a building almost touched the wall, and even rose above it. More frequently, buildings were separated from the wall by tiny patches of green-grass, a fruit tree or two, a few rows of vegetables. Through open windows at eye level the boys caught glimpses of housewives in their kitchens, office workers at their desks, children at their lessons.

Ken glanced ahead and behind along the six-foot-wide path. The other *Istria* passengers, except for Yurgos, were easily recognizable in the slow parade of camera-bedecked tourists.

"I guess we've seen the last of Yurgos," he muttered to Sandy.

"Let's hope so," Sandy said, and they both looked at the Dubons with a feeling of relief.

Madame Dubon had assured them that her ankle was much improved today, but she still leaned rather heavily on her husband's arm. Now she was smiling at him, listening intently as he pointed out to her something about the construction of the wall.

Then Sandy's glance shifted. "Look at that!" he said, raising his camera automatically to his eye.

Ken followed his gaze. They had come even with one of the thoroughfares that crossed the city. Directly below them was a narrow alley between high buildings. Then, on the far side of what was apparently a wide stone-paved street crossing the city in the other direction, the alley was transformed into stairs, rising flight after flight to the foot of the wall built into the hill. The landings that separated one flight from another were presumably street crossings -the places where the mounting stairway was crossed by equally narrow alleys paralleling the wall at various levels.

"I've got to get pictures of all of this," Sandy was saying. "Or Mom and Pop and Bert will never believe it."

Nobody was in a hurry. Everyone wanted to pause every few feet

to look down toward the sea on one side or into the heart of Dubrovnik on the other.

Half an hour or more went by before they came to the wire barrier shutting tourists off from the round fortified tower guarding the old port. Another flight of steps at that point led them down again to ground level.

Miss Burton was standing below, with Wilshire and Hanson. They all waited for the Dubons to make their slow descent.

"Isn't it a fascinating place?" Miss Burton demanded when they were all together.

"Never saw anything like it," Wilshire agreed.

"Quite a city! Quite a city!" Even the usually unimpressed Hanson sounded enthusiastic.

"There's a great deal more to see," Miss Burton promised. "And you can't possibly get lost. Dubrovnik isn't big enough! The Dubons have their own guidebook, I see. Here, Mr. Wilshire, you take mine. And do enjoy yourselves, all of you.

"I'd like nothing better than to browse around the rest of the afternoon with you myself," she went on, "but unfortunately I promised a colleague back home to look up some historic records for her here. I'm afraid it's going to be a dreadful chore! I may not even find anyone in the archives building who can speak any language I know. But there! I mustn't complain until I've tried, must I? Have a wonderful time!" And suddenly she had left them, disappearing around a corner.

"I want to get some pictures of the old port. You know, the part of the city we saw when we were coming in this morning," Sandy said. "It must be over in that direction. Is that O.K. with you, Ken?"

"Sure. I'd like to see it close up myself," Ken agreed.

They lingered with the others for a moment. The Dubons wanted to rest over a cup of coffee before continuing their explorations. Wikhire and Hanson seemed willing to join them.

"See you later then. Here or back on the ship," Sandy said. And he and Ken started off in what they thought was the right direction.

Before they had gone fifty yards, one of the alleys that was a series of steep stair flights tempted them. Sandy photographed it from where they stood, and then they walked part way up so he could get a shot of the stairs from above.

"All those lines of washing hanging across the stairs, and the geraniums in the windows, make it a natural for color film," Sandy was saying half to himself as they walked up still farther.

The landings, as Ken had guessed, occurred where equally narrow alleys crossed the stairs at right angles, cutting the hillside into huge steplike terraces on which houses were crowded like rows of tall

blocks.

A yellow cat asleep on a window sill tempted Sandy into one cross alley, and they followed it until they came to another flight of stairs. There they mounted again until they paused for breath where the stairs ended abruptly at the foot of the city wall.

From where they stood they could look straight down the long, stone staircase to the sunlit center of the city-to that broad main artery that was almost like an elongated plaza dividing Dubrovnik into seaward and landward halves.

Ken tried to remember what Miss Burton had told them about that broad avenue. Hadn't she said it had once been a shallow waterway and that the half of Dubrovnik on the seaward side had been an island?

"We've been wandering around up and down these stairs quite a while," he reminded Sandy a minute later. "If we want to go out and take a look at the old port, we'd better do it."

"Right."

They were within a single flight of the foot of the long alley-stairway when Ken suddenly grabbed Sandy's arm.

"Did you see him?" he asked.

"Who?"

"He crossed the mouth of this alley-walking along the main avenue down there!"

"Who did?" Sandy demanded impatiently.

"Ragusa!"

Sandy laughed. "Wake up! We left Athens three days ago. We are now in Dubrovnik. Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, that is."

Ken, ignoring him, was hurrying down the last flight.

"You did say Ragusa, didn't you?" Sandy said, barely able to keep up with him. "But I guess you meant Hanson or-"

"I meant Ragusa," Ken broke in. "The Italian-the engineering student we had lunch with-who helped us with our shopping. Isn't it funny he didn't tell us he was coming here? He must have known we'd stop at Dubrovnik, if we were taking a ship up the Adriatic coast."

"Look, take it easy," Sandy begged. "I didn't notice anybody who looked like Ragusa. I think you must be imagining things."

They reached the end of the stairs and emerged into the sunshine of the broad avenue. Ken looked toward the right, in the direction of the moving figure.

"You're right!" Sandy said. "There he is! It is Ragusa! Let's catch him. Won't he be surprised!"

"No more surprised than I was when I first recognized him," Ken said. They quickened their steps.

Ragusa, moving along briskly, turned a corner. When they reached

the corner, they saw him again, across a small plaza. He was walking into a church.

Half a minute later Ken and Sandy were also mounting the broad, shallow church steps. They paused at the big door to adjust their eyes to the dimness within.

Almost immediately, they sighted the young Italian making his way slowly down the center aisle, looking from side to side as if scanning the faces of the few women seated here and there in the quiet church.

Ken and Sandy hesitated. They didn't want to startle Ragusa into loud exclamations of surprise in this hushed silence.

"Let's wait," Ken whispered, "until he comes out."

Halfway down the aisle, Ragusa paused beside a bench which had a single occupant, a woman wearing a shawl over her head. She turned toward him, her face raised toward his, and then pulled him quickly down beside her.

The woman's profile had been momentarily but clearly visible to the boys fifty feet behind her. The person Ragusa had obviously been searching for in the church—the person with whom he was now carrying on a whispered conversation—was Miss Burton!

CHAPTER XI

AN ELUSIVE QUARRY

Ken and Sandy backed quietly out of the church.

"I don't get it," Ken said. "What's Miss Burton doing in there with a shawl over her head-meeting an Italian engineering student from Athens?"

"They looked like a couple of conspirators, didn't they?" Sandy grinned self-consciously over the melodramatic word he had chosen.

"I mean," he went on, "if we didn't know Miss Burton, and if--"

"We don't really know her," Ken pointed out. "We've taken her at face value."

Ken's mouth was suddenly so dry he couldn't speak. He swallowed. "Come back here," he said hoarsely, pulling Sandy around the corner of the building, where they would be unseen by anyone leaving the church, but could see the foot of the steps.

"Now listen," Ken hurried on. "This is going to sound crazy, but listen anyway. And be ready to follow Ragusa when he comes out of there."

"Follow him? What are you-?"

"Just listen. Maybe I *am* crazy, but--" Ken swallowed once more and then tried to pour out all at once the fantastic idea that had just exploded in his mind.

"A good way to get a valuable object out of a country, so you could negotiate the ransom for it from a safe distance, would be to plant it on a couple of unsuspecting tourists. Right? Well, we're the tourists. And the valuable object is the Knossos cylinder-the Golden Key."

Sandy's jaw dropped. Ken ignored him and rushed on with his theory.

"They plant the cylinder inside a new hilt specially made to fit a cheap scimitar we buy. We take the scimitar out of Greece. Maybe they hope we'll take it all the way to Switzerland-maybe only as far as Trieste. But when they learn we plan to ask the mate's grandfather in Split to inspect the hilt and tell us if it is the original one, they get panicky. So they slip the scimitar out of our cabin long enough to remove the cylinder and stick the scimitar back through the porthole, hoping we hadn't noticed it was gone."

"Then-!"

"Exactly! You were right about its having been 'borrowed.' That is, if I'm right about any of this." Ken shut his eyes for a second, trying to organize the spinning kaleidoscope of his thoughts into some kind of

order. "Then the cylinder is brought ashore here and handed to--"

He opened his eyes and broke off abruptly. "There goes Ragusa! I'll tell you the rest while we keep him in sight. Just make sure he doesn't see us."

Ragusa hesitated briefly at the foot of the church steps, glancing around the little plaza. Then he started briskly across it, toward Dubrovnik's main thoroughfare.

"Let's go, but stay close to the buildings," Ken warned. Cautiously they moved out into the plaza.

"All right," Sandy prodded, as they hurried along close beside the stone structures rimming the little square. "Go ahead! Talk."

Ken glanced back over his shoulder. There was no sign of Miss Burton.

"There isn't much more--not yet," Ken confessed. "Except that Miss Burton and Ragusa must both be in on it. She must have taken the cylinder--"

"Not out of that scimitar, she didn't," Sandy interrupted. "She'd already gone ashore when the scimitar turned up again in our room."

"All right," Ken said impatiently. "She didn't take it then. But I think she got it somehow, and that she fobbed us all off this afternoon with that researchin-the-archives story so she could turn it over to Ragusa."

"But--"

"I know there are a million holes in this theory, but don't let's lose Ragusa while we figure it all out. Hurry up!"

Ragusa had turned into the wide stone-paved avenue lined with shops and filled with strollers-housewives and businessmen, groups of chattering children on their way home from school, wide-eyed tourists of a dozen nationalities.

For a moment, when the boys reached the wide street, they didn't see the young Italian. Then they saw him gazing into a shop window a scant twenty feet to their left.

Swiftly they drew back out of sight.

"We could split up and take opposite sides of the street," Ken whispered, "if only we'd brought those Megabuck transceivers."

He was referring to tiny pocket-size transceivers that had proved their usefulness not long before in Mexico, during the crisis of *The Mystery of the Plumed Serpent*. The electronic devices had been gifts from their friends Rick Brant and Don Scott, whose scientific curiosity had landed them in hazardous adventures in many parts of the world.

"It would be better yet, if we'd brought Rick and Scotty too," Sandy commented. "Come on. He's moved on."

Ragusa was exercising great caution. He adjusted his walk to the slow pace of the tourist. Time after time he paused in front of shop

windows, apparently using each pause to study the crowd reflected in the glass.

Each time Ragusa halted, the boys halted too, stepping quickly into the shelter of the nearest doorway.

For another five minutes Ragusa maintained his pattern of stopping at frequent intervals. Then he struck out boldly through the crowd, as if convinced that caution was no longer necessary. A few hundred feet later he crossed the street and almost instantly vanished.

"He turned up that alley!" Ken said. The boys made a dash for the spot where Ragusa had last been visible.

The alley was a steep series of stair flights, like those the boys had explored earlier. There were dozens of people on this one, walking up or down, and loitering to talk to each other or to householders leaning from their windows.

The boys sighted Ragusa on the third landing, just as he turned right into the level alley that crossed the stairs at that point.

They reached the landing at the end of a long breathless minute. Ken gulped with relief. Ragusa was not more than several hundred feet away, impatiently pushing through a group of boys tossing a ball back and forth in the six-foot-wide passageway.

They gained on him during the next minute.

Not far beyond Ragusa was a stone barrier, part of the curving city wall against which the alley seemed to end. Ragusa's pace slowed just as the boys started across the patch of sunshine where another flight of stairs traversed the alley.

"Ken! Sandy! Hi there!"

Hanson's voice was always hearty. This time, to the boys' startled ears, it sounded as if it had been amplified by the world's most powerful public-address system.

Instinctively their heads turned toward the sound. Hanson was on the landing just above the one they were crossing. Wilshire and the Dubons were with him. All four waved, delighted at having run into their shipmates in the rabbit warren of Dubrovnik's alleys.

Ken waved back, at the same time snapping his head around again toward Ragusa.

Ragusa had halted and turned around, his face a pale mask of surprise.

With a sinking feeling Ken realized that the Italian too had heard the shouts, and that it was now too late for Sandy and himself to follow him farther undetected.

"Let's join forces!" Hanson was shouting, starting down the stairs toward them.

Ken didn't dare look away from Ragusa. There was only one thing to do now, he told himself.

“Hi! Ragusa!” he called out, as if just sighting the man for the first time. “Recognize us?” He raised his arm above his head in a beckoning gesture.

Ragusa reacted before Ken finished the last word. He spun around and ran, streaking toward the wall at the end of the alley at a furious speed.

Ken took off after him, sensing Sandy at his heels.

Ragusa had almost reached the alley’s end. Was he going to enter one of the few remaining houses?

But Ragusa sped past the last doorway and then suddenly veered out of sight to the left.

Ken covered the remaining fifty feet between himself and the wall in three seconds. His outflung hand grazed the wall itself before he saw the tiny passageway into which Ragusa had vanished. The passageway was only a few feet wide and not more than a dozen feet long. Ken turned into it, but Ragusa was nowhere in sight.

The indistinct blur of motion on Ken’s left didn’t register in time to warn him. From a recessed doorway Ragusa launched himself against Ken like a battering ram, hurling him against the opposite house with an impact that drove the breath from Ken’s body.

Then Ragusa caromed off Ken’s spinning figure, and as the Italian reached the corner they had both rounded seconds before, Ragusa slammed into Sandy. Knocked sideways by the onslaught, the redhead fell to one knee, fingers clutching empty air when they tried to grasp at his fleeing aggressor.

Ragusa was tearing back along the alley. At the first intersection, Hanson and Wilshire, having descended the intervening flight of stairs, stood in his path.

“Stop him!” Sandy called. “Stop him!”

The men looked bewildered. They glanced from Sandy to the figure hurtling toward them. Then they both reached out for Ragusa at once. It was too late. Ragusa was already twisting past them and swinging to the left down the stairs that led to the crowded main street.

Ken was unconsciously rubbing the shoulder that had taken the brunt of Ragusa’s thrust when he reached Sandy’s side in time to see the Italian disappear.

Wilshire and Hanson were hurrying toward them now, in advance of the slower-moving Dubons and a group of people whose curiosity had been aroused at the sight of Ragusa’s wild flight.

“You two all right?” Wilshire called.

Sandy got to his feet and brushed himself off.

“We can’t tell the whole story,” Ken murmured to Sandy before Hanson and Wilshire were upon them.

“We didn’t understand what was going on when you first shouted,” Hanson said. “Then when we tried to grab him, he somehow got past us. Like an eel, wasn’t he, Wilshire? Did he rob you? Are you hurt?” he asked the boys.

The well-meant questions had to be answered. Ken swallowed, knowing Sandy was waiting for him to reply.

“We’re in better shape than we deserve to be,” Ken said, giving Hanson and Wilshire a grin he hoped would appear convincingly sheepish. “In view of the fact that we just made a couple of fools of ourselves.”

“You are hurt?” Now Dubon had reached them, his wife by his side. Both looked deeply concerned.

Then two uniformed men pushed their way through the crowd at the Dubons’ backs.

“Ah, good!” Hanson said, turning toward them. “Police officers! You speak English?”

One of the men answered him in English and asked if they could be of service.

“You’ll have to get the story from these lads here,” Hanson said. “They’re the ones who were hurt.”

“We’re not really hurt much,” Ken assured the circle of interested listeners.

There was no way out of it now. He had to produce an explanation. He put as much of the truth in it as possible.

“That was a fellow we met in Athens,” he started, gesturing toward the direction in which Ragusa had disappeared. “He’d done a lot for us there—took us around, helped us find shops, and all. So when we suddenly saw him here today, we called out to him. You heard us, I guess,” he told the four from the *Istria*. “It was right after we waved to you up those stairs. We thought he heard us, too. But he turned around and kept on going. So we ran to catch up with him.”

Hanson unexpectedly came to Ken’s aid. “Perfectly natural,” he said. “I’d have run after you, if you hadn’t heard my shout back there.”

“Except that you wouldn’t expect the boys to knock you down when you caught up with them,” Wilshire pointed out quietly. “And that’s what this fellow did, didn’t he?”

“Well, not really.” Ken spoke lightly, trying to give the impression that he and Sandy considered the incident more startling than ominous. “I followed him into that little alleyway there, and he suddenly jumped out from a doorway. Slammed right into me. Then he banged into Sandy, on his way around the corner. He could have been just trying to get away from us. Our running after him had scared him for some reason. If he hadn’t recognized us—” He left it at

that.

Wilshire looked doubtful. "But even if he didn't recognize you, it scarcely seems logical for a person to—"

"You've hit it, Wilshire!" Hanson cut in. "The fellow's far from logical. He's downright crazy!" He tapped his forehead significantly. "That's what he looked like to me the minute I saw him-tearing past us like that, and taking off down those stairs as if he thought he could fly! Yes, sir! Touched in the head! I think you should pick him up," he said directly to the English-speaking police officer, "before he does himself harm."

Ken was almost afraid to look at the policeman. The man had been listening intently to everything and taking notes. Now he asked his first direct question.

"What are your names, please?"

Ken told him, explaining that they were traveling on the *Istria*, now anchored in the Gruz harbor.

The officer nodded, when he had finished writing. "And what is the name of your friend?"

"Ragusa," Ken told him.

The officer's expression of polite concern suddenly stiffened. "This is a joke?" he asked sharply.

"Joke?" The amazement in Ken's voice was genuine. It was reflected in the other faces around him.

"Ragusa was once the name of this city-of Dubrovnik," the officer said. "If you think to make jokes of us—"

"I never knew Dubrovnik was once called Ragusa," Ken assured the man. "Honestly. That's what he told us his name was."

"He gave us his card," Sandy said. He pulled out his wallet and began riffling through the accumulation stuffed into it. "Here! That's his address in Italy. He said he'd be going there soon, and that we should visit him if we ever went to Italy."

The officer studied the card. Carefully he copied the words engraved on it. The angry look that had come over his face earlier was disappearing.

"Thank you. I understand now." Politely he returned the card. "It is perhaps true that this man is not well; that he is—" He too touched his forehead significantly. "For his own good we will keep the eye out for him."

Then he asked for a description of Ragusa, and five minutes later the ordeal was over. The police saluted and disappeared. Hanson, Wilshire, and the Du-bons urged the boys to join them for a cup of coffee, or a cool drink.

"You look as if you need it," Hanson said heartily.

Ken thanked them, "But what I think we really need is to get back

to the ship," he said. "I'd like to stand under a hot shower for a while, before this shoulder stiffens up. How about you, Sandy?"

Sandy pointed to a jagged tear in his trousers over one knee. "I'd feel more comfortable if I changed," he said. "I didn't even notice that until now."

Under the eyes of the onlookers, who had still not dispersed, the *Istria* passengers made their way slowly down to the main thoroughfare. There they separated, the boys to walk to the city gate to look for a taxi. The others promised to join them on the ship by dinnertime.

"Whew!" Sandy said, a dozen steps later. "I feel as if somebody had been using my head for a football. I don't know whether I'm coming or going. Suppose there's any chance of finding Yurgos?" he added. "I'd sure like to know what a trained detective thinks of that theory you dreamed up. Or was he leaving town right away?"

"Yurgos?" Ken gave him a lopsided grin. "I was just thinking about that gentleman and about the phone call Miss Burton made that brought him on the run."

"Thinking what?"

"First, that Miss Burton must have known exactly what we meant when we asked her to give George that message about solving the puzzle in the *Clarion*. And I don't think she liked the idea of our being so curious about the fate of the Knossos cylinder.

"So, according to my theory," Ken concluded, "she didn't call George at all. It was Yurgos she called. He came on board to keep us pacified and out of trouble, by playing the part of a Greek policeman. Yurgos is one of them."

CHAPTER XII

MISS BURTON BLAZES A TRAIL

Sandy gave Ken one long baffled look. He didn't speak until they were on the back seat of a taxi moving away from the Dubrovnik gate. "It's just about the craziest yarn I've ever heard!" he said then.

"With no truth in it at all?"

Sandy shook his head slowly. "I didn't say that. It does hang together in a weird sort of way. I can even think of a couple of points to strengthen it-points you didn't mention. Take that day when somebody suggested we all bring our souvenirs up on deck. Burton was against it, though it was just the kind of thing you'd think she might have suggested herself."

Ken nodded. "I figured she couldn't afford to buy much. And she did bring up only a few things."

"That could account for it," Sandy agreed. "But it could also be that she bought very few of the things most tourists buy because she isn't an ordinary tourist -because she had other things to do in Athens. The other point," Sandy continued, "is that she yelled as if she was scared to death, that same day, when somebody waved the scimitar around. Scaring so easily doesn't sound like the intrepid world-traveling Burton, either. But if the Knossos cylinder was inside that scimitar--"

Ken landed a fist triumphantly on Sandy's knee. "Of course! She was terrified for fear the hilt would come off and the cylinder come sailing out on deck."

"Wait a minute, Ken. There's still one important detail you haven't mentioned. And I don't see how this one can be explained at all: How could the thieves know enough about us, or our plans, to decide we should be their carrier pigeons?" Then, before Ken could answer, he added, "And there's a question that comes even before that: Why did they want to get the cylinder out of Athens at all?"

"The second question's not so difficult to answer," Ken said. "Probably, when the plan for secret ransom negotiations blew up, it seemed safer to take the cylinder out of a country where everybody was on the lookout for them and it. The note they sent probably was designed to take the heat off while they managed the shift."

"That makes sense," Sandy agreed. "But why pick us?"

"I think," Ken said slowly, "that the people who engineered the robbery went shopping around for a tourist-one with certain definite qualifications-as soon as they decided to get the cylinder out of Greece. Naturally they'd start at places where lots of tourists go. At a

hotel like ours, for example. Ragusa, let's say, was one of the shoppers. He saw us with George in that police car. It gave him the idea that we had powerful friends-that we might not be searched as carefully as other people leaving the country, maybe. So he deliberately made our acquaintance."

"Did he?" Sandy asked skeptically. "You mean he knew just where we'd get lost that night?"

"If he was following us, he did. And that was easy, because he could have heard George shout the name of that restaurant out the car window. What's more," Ken added, "I think the thugs who tried to hold us up in that cul-de-sac were his men. And it was their job to give Ragusa the chance to come to our rescue."

"But if we'd taken a taxi, instead of deciding to walk back to the hotel that night--"

"The driver of the taxi nearest the restaurant could have been in on it too," Ken pointed out. "Anyway, one way or another, Ragusa was prepared to scrape acquaintance with us. Then he found out when we were leaving Greece, and where we were going. Apparently we suited him on both scores. Next, he found out that we wanted to buy souvenirs, and what kind we wanted to buy. We were suitable on that score too. So the cylinder was hidden inside the scimitar--"

"But, Ken," Sandy protested, "we looked at a dozen old weapons that day. The only reason we happened to buy the one we did was that we couldn't afford any of the others."

"How do we know we couldn't?" Ken demanded. "Who told us they cost so much? Ragusa! He didn't take us to popular tourist shops, where the clerks might have spoken English. Everything had to be translated for us by Ragusa. For all we know he lied about the real price of every weapon we looked at. Probably pushed it way up beyond what he knew we could pay. Why, by the time that peddler came along-and don't forget we decided he'd been one of the thugs who tried to rob us the night before-it was practically a cinch that we'd buy the one he showed us."

"But just suppose we hadn't?" Sandy persisted. "Suppose we hadn't liked it?"

"In that case, I think," Ken said slowly, "we'd have been quietly crossed off the list of prospects, without even knowing we'd been on it. Perhaps the scimitar had already been offered to a couple of other prospects that day-people with our same general qualifications: they were about to leave Greece, they were interested in old weapons, and so forth. And if we'd turned the scimitar down, it probably would have been offered to somebody else who also had passed the tests. But lucky us! We bought ourselves in! We measured up to the final qualification!"

“You mean, then,” Sandy said slowly, “that we weren’t picked for the job—that, instead, we picked ourselves?”

“That’s how I think it must have happened. Well?” Ken challenged. “How does it sound?”

The taxi crossed the broad plaza to deposit them at the edge of the wharf where the *Istria* lay.

“It still sounds crazy. But at least, now,” Sandy admitted, “it does sound possible.” He took a deep breath. “Let’s take a good look at that scimitar. If we can find a possible hiding place for a three-inch-long hollow cylinder inside its hilt-well, so far as I’m concerned, that’ll be it!”

Five minutes later, behind the locked door of their cabin, Sandy was examining the scimitar.

“No sign of a joint in the leather covering of the grip,” he muttered. “What was it Wilshire said? That this ball didn’t look authentic?”

“That’s right.”

“Then let’s see if it comes off.”

Holding the shaft of the hilt in his left hand, Sandy wrapped his right around the globe-shaped pommel and tried to twist it.

Nothing happened.

He took a new grip and tried again, the muscles of his forearms knotting with the effort.

Suddenly the ball shifted a fraction of an inch.

Then Sandy was twirling it swiftly, around and around. Finally it came free, and he was staring down at the hilt’s two parts, one in each hand.

“What do you know about that!” he breathed.

Centered inside the hollow hilt was a metal bolt, or shaft, its upper end threaded to fit the threads on the matching hole in the pommel. The lower end of the bolt, visible when they held the open pipelike hilt under the light, had been welded to the end of the blade just above the S-shaped hand guard.

“We might as well test it, just to prove we’re not dreaming,” Ken said. He found an old envelope in his pocket, tore off part of it, and twisted the rest into a cylinder roughly three inches long and about an inch in diameter. Then, holding the scimitar vertical, hilt up, he slipped the paper cylinder over the bolt. It fitted perfectly between the bolt and the hilt’s leather-covered steel exterior.

“Pack it with cotton, or something, so it wouldn’t rattle,” Sandy whispered, awed, “screw the top back on, and you could carry the cylinder around the world without anybody ever suspecting you had it!” Suddenly his eyes met Ken’s. “I’m just beginning to take it in! We had the Knossos cylinder-in our own hands! And now it’s gone!”

Ken nodded grimly. "That's about it."

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" Sandy demanded. "We can't just stand here and do nothing!"

The decision they finally reached, after discarding every other possibility that occurred to them, was to take their story to the captain.

"He'll understand our English," Ken summed it up, while Sandy replaced the pommel so that the scimitar showed no sign of having been tampered with. "He'll listen to us. And he's got the kind of authority we need to help us get police cooperation, and fast! The cylinder's probably in Dubrovnik now, but it probably won't stay there long."

"Maybe it's already gone!" Sandy suggested. "Maybe Yurgos had it and took it with him-whenever he went. You know, he must be the one who 'borrowed' the scimitar yesterday. He stayed on the ship when the rest of us went ashore."

Ken nodded. "Yes. I think he probably took the scimitar and removed the cylinder from it. But why would Ragusa have turned up here at all, if not to take it over when they decided they had to get it away from us? Though why they needed Ragusa," he went on, in a puzzled voice, "when Burton and Yurgos are both obviously in on the deal-"

"I know why they needed him!" Sandy broke in. "Ragusa must be their craftsman, the one who fixed up this hiding place originally." He tapped the scimitar. "And now that they need another phony souvenir, probably to plant on another tourist, they brought Ragusa here to fix that up too."

"You mean we might go into Dubrovnik now and buy a carved wooden nutcracker, or something-and get the cylinder back again?" Ken attempted a grin, but it didn't come off. "Let's go find the captain," he said abruptly.

The captain wasn't on deck. He wasn't in his cabin. He wasn't on the bridge. And the first mate-the only other English-speaking member of the ship's company-was also nowhere to be found. Normally, in port, Mr. Papalich was on duty supervising the loading and unloading that went on. But by this late hour of the day-it was after five o'clock-the longshoremen had disappeared, and the first mate had disappeared with them.

The boys sought out Mike, the steward, who was in the dining room setting the tables for dinner.

"Captain Primich?" Ken threw his hands wide, palms up, hoping to convey a query as to where the captain was.

Mike beamed his understanding. He repeated the captain's name, pointed shoreward, and then, grinning, mimed the acts of eating,

dancing, and finally going to sleep.

Ken groaned. "I remember now! The captain told us he had relatives here. Mike means he's gone ashore to spend the night with them."

"In Gruz, do you suppose?" Sandy wondered. "Or in Dubrovnik? Maybe we could still find him."

Ken spoke the names of the two towns in turn. Again Mike obviously understood.

"Gruz?" Mike repeated, and shrugged elaborately. "Dubrovnik?" Again he shrugged.

"He doesn't know where the captain is," Ken interpreted.

They went through the same queries as to the first mate. This time, Mike simply pointed shoreward and shrugged.

"He doesn't know where the mate is, either," Sandy said glumly.

On the way back to their cabin they heard a babble of English-speaking voices. Sandy went to one of the dining-room windows that overlooked the wharf. "Here they all come, including Burton. Let's get out of sight."

Through their closed cabin door they heard footsteps descending the stairs, and Miss Burton's brisk voice.

"The poor boys!" she was saying. "What a shocking experience for them! That young man must certainly have been crazy, as you suggested, Mr. Hanson. Do you think the police will make a real effort to find him?"

"Hard to tell," Hanson said.

Ken sensed that Miss Burton had joined the other passengers only a few minutes earlier, perhaps on the wharf, and had just been told about the events of the afternoon.

"The boys gave the police a description," Wilshire put in, "but I suppose it could fit a good many people. You know the sort of thing-dark, slender, medium height. And of course there was that odd business about the name. The officer said Dubrovnik was once called Ragusa, and I think he suspected the fellow's real name was something else. If he's right, that would make tracing the chap even more difficult."

"Should we knock on the boys' door and see how they are?" Miss Burton suggested.

"Better not," Wilshire advised. "They looked a little done in. May have decided to catch some rest before dinner, especially if they plan to go back to the festival in town tonight."

The passengers separated then. Two persons-the boys knew it must be Miss Burton and Wilshire-tiptoed past on the way to their own cabins farther down the little hall.

"What now?" Sandy whispered. "Is there anybody at all on board

who could help us?"

"You want to ask Burton to make a telephone call for us to George?" Ken asked wryly.

"Be serious!"

"I never felt more serious in my life," Ken assured him. "But we don't know enough about either Wilshire or Hanson to throw ourselves on their mercy. And I don't know exactly what they could do to help us if we did. And if Yurgos is what we think he is, and not a Greek policeman, then Dubon has never had any sort of clearance at all."

Sandy banged a frustrated fist against his forehead. "I hadn't even thought of that angle-about Dubon."

The dinner gong sounded while they were still staring at each other in grim silence.

"If we don't go out there and eat, we're going to arouse an awful lot of curiosity," Sandy muttered. "But I certainly don't feel hungry."

Ken didn't even comment on this unusual admission.

Absentmindedly Sandy poked a finger in the hole torn in his trousers. He looked down at it in surprise. "I forgot all about that! Guess I'd better change."

"And I'd better look as if I'd had a shower not long ago." Ken moved to the basin and began to splash water over his face and hair.

"If we could just sit here and think for a couple of hours, we might come up with something," Sandy said despairingly, thrusting the torn trousers into his bag. "At least," he added, "we can say we don't feel like going back to Dubrovnik tonight, festival or no festival. Unless you think it would do any good to tell the Dubrovnik police the whole story?"

"I don't know," Ken admitted. He reached for a towel. "I wish now I'd tried to get that English-speaking officer off to one side this afternoon, and at least given him a hint that Ragusa might have some connection with the Athens museum theft. But right then everything was so confusing, especially with Dubon there. And if we go back to the police tonight, with no real evidence to offer them--"

"We could take the scimitar along," Sandy suggested. "Of course there's nothing hidden in it now," he added, "so I suppose it wouldn't mean much."

Ken suddenly tossed the towel onto his bunk. "Maybe we can take them something else! If we tell them the whole story, and suggest they check on us, via a phone call to the Athens police, and at the same time give them Ragusa's address in Dubrovnik--"

"And I thought you really had something!" Sandy broke in disgustedly. "We don't *know* Ragusa's address," he explained to Ken, in the tone of one addressing an idiot.

Ken was grinning. "Not yet, we don't," he agreed. "But listen!" Five minutes later the boys joined their table. Miss Burton immediately asked them how they felt.

"We weren't hurt, not seriously, anyway," Ken assured her. Then he turned to Hanson and spoke the first line of the dialogue he and Sandy had hastily plotted before leaving their cabin. "We saw that English-speaking policeman again," he said, "just as we were walking through the city gate after we'd left you and the others. And, you know, he seemed to be taking that whole business more seriously than we'd thought he had."

"Yes," Sandy picked it up. "He told us the police were really going to look for Ragusa-if that's actually his name-and they'd let us know if they found him before we sail tomorrow."

"Well, I must say I'm not surprised," Hanson remarked, nodding his satisfaction. "That policeman looked like an intelligent fellow. And with so much tourist money in the city, I expect the police do everything they can to make sure visitors are protected from that sort of crazy behavior."

The boys agreed that Hanson probably was right. Then Ken inquired politely what luck Miss Burton had had with her research.

"Oh, quite good," she said quickly. "I wasn't able to find all the family records my friend was hoping for, but I tracked down some of the items she wanted. So my long dreary afternoon among the archives wasn't totally wasted."

She smiled, and effectively changed the subject by asking the others if they were returning to Dubrovnik that evening. "The Dubons say they've had enough sightseeing for one day," she added, "but I'm sure the rest of you don't want to miss the fireworks."

"Wilshire and I are going back right after dinner," Hanson said.

"And you?" She looked at the boys.

"I guess so," Ken told her. "What about you?"

"I ought to glance at those notes I took, while I can still read my handwriting." She laughed. "I really should be ashamed of it-it's so dreadful! But I do love fireworks! I once saw the most remarkable display in Scotland-" And she was off on one of her instructive lectures that lasted almost all the way through the meal.

The Dubons finished their dinner first, said polite good nights to the others, and retired to their cabin.

Wilshire finished next. "I'm ready to go," he announced. "Who else is coming?"

Mike was just serving dessert to the table for four. Hanson waved his away and gulped down his coffee. "I'm with you," he said. "Ken? Sandy? Miss Burton?"

Miss Burton announced that she had decided to remain aboard

long enough to go over her notes.

Ken pointed to Sandy who had taken two large pastries on his plate. "He doesn't leave any table as long as there's food on it. You go along. We'll look for you in Dubrovnik."

The two men left the dining room. When they had been gone a minute or so Ken suddenly jumped up. "We should have agreed on a place to meet them later! I'll see if I can catch them. Excuse me."

He ran for the stairs. The men's early departure had given him a better excuse to leave the dining room than he had hoped for. According to the makeshift plan he and Sandy had concocted, he had braced himself to make what he feared would be an unconvincing remark about needing air, in order to have a brief time alone on deck.

Outside, in the warm night, he watched Hanson and Wilshire cross the plaza toward the rank of taxis at its far side. Then he made himself count up to a hundred, slowly.

When he went below again, he said, "I missed them. But you'll never guess what happened, Sandy! I was standing at the head of the gangplank when a police officer came aboard with a message for us!"

"A message for us!" Sandy put his coffee cup down with an impressive show of surprise. "What about?"

"Asking us to call in at the west gate police station this evening. Seems the police have a line on where Ragusa is staying and want us to go there with an officer to see if they've got the right man!"

"Say," Sandy said admiringly, "that's real efficiency! Isn't it, Miss Burton?"

"It certainly is," she said. "Unless they're mistaken, of course. And what a pity if you miss the fireworks just to—"

"Oh, I don't think it will take all evening," Ken said easily when she let her sentence hang unfinished in the air. "Anyway, we can hardly refuse. So hurry up, Sandy. I told the man we'd be there shortly. If we have to get to the police station first and then go somewhere else afterward we'd better start, or we will miss the fireworks!"

They left Miss Burton finishing her coffee, and assuring them that she would probably be looking for them on Dubrovnik's main street by the time they themselves were free.

Once off the gangplank, the boys raced across the plaza to the taxi rank, found an English-speaking driver, and asked him to pull around the corner and wait.

"A friend may be coming along with us," Ken said, hoping he'd told his last lie for the evening.

"O.K." The driver was cheerfully agreeable.

A minute ticked slowly away. And then another.

"We could be wrong, I suppose-about everything," Sandy

murmured.

“I don’t believe it,” Ken said firmly. “For one thing, did you ever hear of a librarian who didn’t have a good handwriting? It would be like a newspaperman who couldn’t type.”

Sandy grinned suddenly. “You’re right! Why, she-“

Ken gripped his arm.

Miss Burton was coming down the gangplank and hurrying across the plaza.

As soon as she stepped into a taxi, and it pulled out of line and headed for Dubrovnik, Ken said, “All right, driver. We won’t wait any longer. Will you follow that taxi that just took off?”

“O.K.”

“It’s working!” Sandy said. “She’s going to lead us to Ragusa!”

CHAPTER XIII

OVER THE WALL

The open square in front of Dubrovnik's west gate was twinkling with lights and crowded with people in holiday mood. Some were moving toward the old castle just outside the wall where theatrical performances took place. Others were strolling across the moat bridge and into the city.

When the boys jumped out of their taxi at the edge of the square, Sandy had no difficulty keeping Miss Burton in sight as Ken paid their driver. She seemed to be the only person in the cheerful throng who was in a hurry. Her purposeful stride took her straight to the gate. The boys were only fifty feet behind her when she went through it.

Inside the wall she walked steadily eastward on Dubrovnik's main thoroughfare, sidestepping laughing groups of young people and family parties dressed in their somber best.

Finally she paused and looked up at a street sign. Then, apparently satisfied, she turned into an alley.

"This isn't very close to the place Ragusa seemed to be heading for," Sandy said, as they quickened their steps.

"It's probably another way of getting to the same place," Ken said.

Miss Burton, climbing rapidly, was just passing the first landing of the mounting stairs when they turned the corner and brought her in sight again.

They hurried after her, up steps illuminated by street lights and glowing house windows, and almost as crowded as the main thoroughfare. By the time she reached the third landing she was only half a flight above them.

Instinctively they slowed their pace. Most of the crowd was behind them now. They were beginning to feel conspicuous, aware that a single backward glance might reveal their presence if they were too close, even though these upper flights were less brightly lighted than those below.

At the fifth and last landing Ken pulled Sandy into the cross alley. Miss Burton, the only person visible above them now, was still climbing toward the stone barrier, part of the city wall, that closed off the end of the alley. It seemed obvious that her destination must be one of a scant dozen or so remaining houses. They couldn't risk being within view when she turned her head toward whatever doorway was her destination.

Cautiously Ken poked his head around the corner of the building that sheltered them. A shaded electric bulb, attached to the wall up

ahead, cast a cone of light on the ancient stones of the wall itself and on the segment of alley just below. Close to the wall, on the left of the alley, two ground-floor windows spilled light and music into the narrow passageway. All the other houses seemed to be dark.

Miss Burton abruptly mounted the raised front step of a house on her right. For a moment her figure was silhouetted against the light beyond her. Ken could see her hand reach forward as if to grasp a doorknob.

But he didn't dare crane his head far enough out into the alley to learn which house she was about to enter.

Then she pushed the door open, releasing a flood of light that washed over her and illuminated the door directly across the alley. A moment later she had disappeared and the door was closed again.

Ken breathed a sigh of relief. "The house she went into," he said, "is opposite a door painted a bright blue. Come on. Let's take a look at Mr. Ragusa's hideaway."

The blue door proved to be the entrance to the last house on the left of the alley-the one from whose ground-floor windows came the noise and glow of a gay party. Past lacy curtains, pulled aside to let in the warm night air, the boys could see several dozen people gathered around the edge of a room, clapping in time to the music of a grinning, red-faced accordionist. Dancers in the center of the circle were spinning dizzily, arm in arm, first turning in one direction, then the other.

The two-story stone house Miss Burton had entered, on the other side of the narrow alley, also occupied property adjoining the massive city wall. But this house, instead of having been built against the wall, stood twenty yards from it. The intervening space, Ken assumed, was a garden like those at the foot of the rampart on the opposite side of the city. Its own wall, rising more than a foot above Sandy's head and stretching unbroken from the corner of the house to the alley's end, hid it from passers-by.

All four windows at the front of the house were dark. The second-floor windows along the side of the house, visible over what Ken thought of as the garden wall, were dark too.

"Let's see if there are lights in any ground-floor windows on the side," Ken said. "After all, we know there's somebody in there. Boost me up."

They glanced first at the house across the alley, and chose a spot not touched by the light streaming from its windows.

Sandy made a stirrup of his clasped hands. Ken put a foot in it. Sandy raised him up.

Steadying himself against the rough stone, Ken hooked his elbows over the top of the foot-thick wall. "O.K.," he said quietly. "Let me

down.”

“There’s one room lighted up,” he went on, when he was beside Sandy again, “but it’s way at the back of the house-at too much of an angle from here to see into the room. We’re going to have to go over the wall,” he added reluctantly, “if we really want to make sure Ragusa is in there before we go to the police.”

“Hmm.” Sandy’s voice showed no enthusiasm for the project. “What’s over there? Anything that could make a row, like a pile of tin cans? Or a dog, maybe?”

“Nothing like that,” Ken said. “The layout’s quite simple. The garden runs from this wall to another parallel one about forty feet away from us. That’s the garden’s width. Its length is about sixty feet, running from the rear of the house all the way back to the city wall. Most of the area is just smooth grass, with what seems to be a couple of little flower beds near the house. In the corner, where the far wall of the garden butts against the city wall, there’s what looks like a small garden shed.”

“A shed?” Sandy asked.

“Don’t worry,” Ken assured him. “If it isn’t a garden shed it’s a little summerhouse, or something. Anyway, it’s certainly not a doghouse, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

“That’s what I was thinking,” Sandy agreed. “I wouldn’t like being cooped up inside those walls and having a dog-or anything else-announce our presence.”

“I wouldn’t like it, either,” Ken said. “But I really don’t think we have to worry. We can get to the window by walking on grass, first along the inside of the wall, then close against the house. All we need is one quick look. The whole thing shouldn’t take more than a minute.”

“All right. Let’s get it over with.” Once more Sandy clasped his hands to take Ken’s foot. “Get astride the top and then give me a hand from there.”

Five seconds later they both landed soundlessly on soft grass on the other side of the wall. Ken took the lead, hugging the wall and following it toward the corner of the house, turning when he reached it to head for the lighted window.

Suddenly a dull boom shook the ground beneath them. While the air was still quivering, the night exploded into a shower of brilliant sparks and zigzag streaks of colored light. Instantly the little garden, almost completely dark a moment before, became dazzlingly illuminated. Every flower, every blade of grass stood sharply and vividly revealed.

For a split second the boys stood frozen, pressed against the house wall. Then, as one, they threw themselves to the ground, flat against

the turf, as if trying to disappear out of sight into the short grass.

For what seemed an endless period of time, but actually was only thirty seconds, splashes of color streaked continuously across the sky, and fountains of fire spurted upward into the heavens and cascaded down again.

Then, as suddenly as it had begun, it was all over. The sky was once more a black canopy high above the small dark garden.

“To think I used to like fireworks!” Sandy breathed, raising a cautious head. “Come on. Let’s get this job done fast. That could happen again any minute.”

They covered the distance to the lighted window without incident, stopping just short of it.

But, this close to their goal, they suddenly realized that seeing into the lighted room beyond was not going to be easy. On the window sill, which was five feet above the ground, rested a window box roughly a foot tall and crowded with blooming plants that rose another foot into the air. Even Sandy would be unable to look over that leafy barrier.

Ken groaned under his breath.

The window was open, and angry voices were audible through it. Ken could distinguish Miss Burton’s. He thought the voice answering her belonged to Ragusa. He couldn’t be sure. And the exchange was being carried on in Greek. He knew he could listen to it for hours without learning a single fact.

Nothing but a look into the room would give them the answer they were seeking.

Almost without thinking, Ken reached out to touch the window box which was thwarting their plan. His fingers signaled the message that it did not extend to the end of the sill.

Crouching low, Ken edged a few feet away from the house. From that vantage point it was clear that the window box was shorter than the sill it stood on. At either side of it was a narrow slit of light. Ken moved back to whisper his discovery into Sandy’s ear.

A second later Ken’s face was close to one slit, Sandy’s to the other.

Miss Burton and the man she was talking to were brushing into a small heap what appeared to be a litter of wood shavings on a table near the center of the room.

The man was Yurgos.

Ken clenched his fist in angry disappointment. It was not the sight Ken and Sandy had hoped for.

Then Ragusa appeared in the part of the room visible to Ken. He had a cloth in his hands. He too went to the table, and began to gather into the cloth the small collection of tools lying to one side. Among them, Ken could recognize several chisels and what looked like a wood bit.

When the tools were snugly wrapped, Ragusa carried them to the far wall of the room and pushed them out of sight on the top of a large wardrobe.

Now Ken could feel his heart thumping against his ribs. What he had seen, he felt sure, was proof of almost everything he and Sandy had deduced, including the fact that Ragusa was a craftsman brought to Dubrovnik to manufacture a new hiding place for the Knossos cylinder.

Had the man finished the job? Or were the evidences of his work being cleared away only because Miss Burton had brought the report that the police knew of Ragusa's address?

Ragusa was hurrying back to the table with a newspaper, which he held spread out just under the table's rim. Miss Burton brushed the litter into it. He balled the paper up and thrust it into a small stove.

With a gesture of satisfaction he rubbed the palms of his hands together. Miss Burton, glaring, spoke to him angrily as she flicked open a folded cloth and spread it on the table. Ragusa snapped back, but he looked worried again. She pushed him aside, as if scorning his help.

From somewhere out of Ken's sight she brought a vase of flowers and centered it on the cloth. The table had completely lost all resemblance to a woodworker's bench.

Then the woman disappeared briefly again, and this time came back into view with a pair of heavily carved wooden candlesticks.

Yurgos and Ragusa both watched silently, as if awaiting her orders, while she placed the two typical examples of Yugoslavian handcraft on the table, one candlestick on each side of the vase.

"The cylinder is in one of those candlesticks!" The thought leaped to Ken's mind with such force that for an instant he was afraid he had shouted it aloud.

Then he ducked below the window until he could grab Sandy and pull the redhead down beside him. "It must be in one of the candlesticks!" He barely breathed the words against the redhead's ear. "Let's get the police!"

A half-choked cry of rage froze them where they crouched.

Yurgos, head and shoulders thrust out past the leaves and blossoms in the flower box, was bending over them like some hideous gargoyle, his face contorted with fury.

One powerful hand reached toward them.

Then the hand disappeared.

Their paralyzed bodies jerked upward.

They were still only half erect when the hand darted through the window again. This time it was curled around the butt of a small shiny revolver.

CHAPTER XIV

BOTTLE BARRAGE

"Do not move!" Yurgos' gun was pointed directly at Ken's head, from a distance of little more than a yard.

At that instant the earth shook again under another barrage of fireworks. Brilliant flashes of red and white and gold streaked through the night, and cascades of sparks spilled down from the sky.

Yurgos' glance flicked automatically upward.

Sandy came alive. Springing out of his crouch, and reaching toward the gun in one continuous motion, he clamped his hands around Yurgos' wrist and pulled with all the strength of his powerful muscles.

Yurgos was neither small nor weak, but, leaning awkwardly out over the flower box, he was off balance. For a critical split second he had been off guard.

His strangled cry, half astonishment, half rage, ended in a choked grunt as his body hurtled through the air. He crash-landed on the lawn several feet beyond the window box, which had toppled beneath his dragging weight.

"Run!" Sandy shoved Ken hard.

Together, they raced for the wall over which they had climbed earlier.

Side by side they reached it. Ken didn't wait for a helpful boost from Sandy. Sandy would have enough to do, getting over the wall himself. He made a flying leap, hands upthrust. His fingers clamped over the wall's edge. Flattening his body against the stone, he tried to hoist himself upward.

Something thudded with a flat crack nearby. Stinging fragments of rock struck his face. In his desperate effort to get his elbows crooked over the wall, he scarcely noticed the sting.

That flat crack sounded again.

Sandy, spread-eagled against the wall on his right, let go an instant after Ken's face was once more stung by flying fragments. "Drop!" he cried.

Ken realized then what he had refused to accept earlier. They were being fired at! And outlined against the wall, in the illumination of the fireworks, they were perfect targets. Give the marksman another moment to accustom his eyes to the erratic light, and he wouldn't miss.

He let himself fall. For a moment they lay still.

Just beyond the wall, not more than five yards away, the gay party

went noisily on. "If only we could just get over there and tell them we need help," Ken thought.

He shut the possibility out of his mind. Climbing the wall meant setting themselves up again as sitting ducks in a shooting gallery.

But they couldn't remain where they were.

If there were one or two more lengthy displays of

In the illumination of the fireworks, they were perfect targets fireworks, they would be spotted, no matter how they flattened themselves against the ground.

Suddenly Ken remembered the little shed in the corner of the garden. There was a narrow space between it and the high rampart enclosing the city. If they could get to that space, by hugging the wall and staying as far from the lighted window as possible, they would be protected on three sides.

During a particularly vivid burst of fireworks, he checked on the location of the two flower beds breaking the tablelike flatness of the grass. The plants stood more than two feet tall. By running crouched over, and between the brightest flashes-

"Behind that shed!" Ken whispered. "It's the only cover!" Sandy nodded.

Then they were on their feet, bent double, half running and half crawling. They passed one flower bed. They passed the other. They dove headlong into the comparative safety of the six-foot space behind the shed, a tiny refuge whose only outlet was into the open garden they had just escaped.

"If we yell for help-" Sandy gasped, leaning against the shed and gulping in air.

"With all that noise across the alley, nobody would hear us except-" Ken jerked his head toward the house, whose one lighted window they could no longer see from their hiding place. "And even if anybody else did hear us, they probably wouldn't understand what 'Help!' means."

The burst of fireworks ended with his last word.

"If we could count on it staying dark for a minute, we could try the wall again."

"If-" Ken said. He put his head around the corner of the shed, and instantly pulled it back. The long beam of a flashlight was cutting bright swaths across the garden. He had barely avoided it.

"That wasn't Yurgos who fired at us! He's still lying on the ground," he reported. "Ragusa's at the window with a flashlight in one hand and a gun in the other."

Sandy groaned. "And when Yurgos does come to, there'll be two of them-both armed! They must know we're still inside here someplace!"

Once more man-made lightning blazed across the sky. Instinctively

the boys moved back toward the farthest corner of their open-ended shelter, eerily illuminated now by the colored fire overhead.

“Look!” Sandy grabbed Ken’s arm. He was pointing at a heap of bottles, some whole, some broken, piled on the ground at the base of the towering city wall.

“Get ready to pay for some broken windows!” Ken reached toward the pile. Sandy did too. “If we can just make somebody hear us!”

By standing flat against the city wall, they could see over the small shed to the darkened second-floor windows above the room Ragusa occupied—windows that now glittered and winked with light reflected from the sky.

They let fly almost simultaneously.

Hurling end over end through the air, the bottles looked like erratically soaring birds.

Ken’s splintered on stone below a sill. Sandy’s crashed noisily into the glass above, leaving only a jagged fringe of shards around the frame.

Even as they reached for more bottles, they were listening. If the revelers across the alley stopped their music, it would mean they had heard a noise which puzzled them. With luck, they might decide to investigate.

But the accordion still wheezed out its gay tune, amplified by singing voices, stamping feet, clapping hands.

Ken imagined himself in that crowded room, and knew how difficult it would be to catch one’s attention there. Any sound from outside would be lost in the rhythmic noise.

“The windows in *that* house!” he said, gesturing toward the far side of the alley, and the dark panes above the room where the party was going on. The crash of a breaking bottle might be felt, even if its sound was not audible.

Again they hurled their fragile weapons, from as near the mouth of their cul-de-sac as they dared. In the boom of explosive fireworks that immediately followed, they could not hear the sound of the impacts themselves.

Suddenly the light overhead faded to darkness, and simultaneously the singing ended with a shouted climax. The breathless laughter that followed sounded like a faint whisper compared to the preceding bedlam.

“Now!”

A split second later they both again had a bottle in each hand, and were hurling them with all their might.

Four crashes—two were against stone, two against glass—followed in swift succession. Ken and Sandy reached toward the pile of bottles once more.

An angry voice bellowed from the direction of the alley. A second joined it.

A light went on behind one of the dark windows in the opposite house, revealing a great hole in the center of the glass, and a woman shaking her fist furiously and shouting a protest.

"They heard us!" Ken exulted. "They heard!"

Then two more windows came alight, among the half dozen or so visible from the boys' hiding place. And still more angry voices called protests.

Ken dared a look around the corner of the shed, just as a burst of golden fire overhead illuminated the garden and its surroundings.

Five lighted windows within his view framed angry or curious faces. Half a dozen young masculine heads rested, like a row of painted pumpkins, on the garden wall. Other heads bobbed momentarily into sight behind them, young people jumping up in attempts to catch quick glimpses of what went on inside.

All eyes looked toward the window of Ragusa's room. Just inside it, leaning forward over the sill, were Ragusa himself and Miss Burton, both pouring a torrent of words down upon Yurgos standing on the grass beneath. Ragusa's wildly gesticulating hands were now empty. Yurgos' weapon was also invisible.

Ken reached back to drag Sandy with him. "We've got an audience! They can't do anything now."

Boldly they stepped out of the cul-de-sac, with the intention of walking straight toward the wall.

They had taken two steps when, out of the corner of his eye, Sandy saw Yurgos bend toward the ground.

He was reaching for his gun! As the realization flashed into Sandy's brain he shouted "Look out!" to Ken and streaked toward the crouching figure.

Ragusa shouted. Miss Burton screamed.

Yurgos straightened and spun around. His hands were still empty. They were doubled into fists.

Sandy was almost upon him when he saw that the man was unarmed. As Sandy tried to stop his forward motion, his heels skidded on smooth grass. Arms flailing like the sails of a windmill, he fought for his balance. One leg buckled beneath him and he toppled forward, sliding into Yurgos headfirst.

Yurgos took one swift step backward and then aimed a kick at Sandy's prone figure.

Sandy caught sight of the raised foot. He rolled over, arm thrown protectively up across his face. Yurgos' shoe barely grazed his shoulder. It drew back for another blow.

Sandy rolled over once more and found himself against a barrier-

the flower-filled window box now upside down where it had fallen.

Ken had automatically ducked at Sandy's warning shout. A split second afterward he had looked toward his friend. Then he too started across the grass. Now he threw himself at Yurgos in a flying tackle.

Yurgos' full weight was on one foot. The other was already moving forward in an arc toward Sandy's head. He fell heavily sideways under the unexpected attack. Ken crashed on top of him.

An instant later, with a single powerful heave, Yurgos thrust Ken's winded body off his own. Then he was on top, his clawlike hands closing around Ken's throat.

Dimly Ken was aware of Sandy's red head appearing just behind Yurgos' shoulder. A fist shot out. The paralyzing grip on Ken's throat loosened.

Somebody was helping Ken to his feet. Through pain-blurred eyes he saw Sandy holding Yurgos by an armlock that brought the man's wrist far up toward the base of his neck. Once more Yurgos' contorted face looked like that of a gargoyle.

Ragusa and Miss Burton still stood at the window, staring outward with dazed expressions.

Everything else within Ken's sight seemed to have changed in the few seconds since he had darted across the garden after Sandy. Besides the two young men who had helped him up, there were several other strangers gathered around Sandy and Yurgos and himself. He looked toward the wall and saw other young men dropping down from its height.

A shrill police whistle sounded somewhere close by. Voices called excitedly from high windows.

The head of a police officer appeared above the wall. At the same time a heavy fist pounded on the outer door of the house, and an authoritative voice shouted words which Ken could not understand, but which he knew must be the equivalent of "Open up!"

The young strangers in the garden were calling out urgently.

A uniformed officer appeared at the window between Ragusa and Miss Burton.

Almost immediately a door in the house wall—a door Ken had not noticed earlier—opened into the garden, and a second uniformed police officer appeared. He came forward, snapping out unintelligible questions.

At the same moment Miss Burton thrust aside the officer who stood beside her, and leaned out the window. "Police!" she called. "Do you speak English?"

"Yes, madame." The man approaching Ken and Sandy turned toward her.

"Then arrest those two!" Miss Burton ordered.

“That’s right, officer!” Yurgos tried to pull away from Sandy, winced, and backed up again. “This man has attacked me! So did he!” He glanced toward Ken. “Make him let go of me and-“

“We attacked you!” Sandy said loudly. “Officer, he had a gun! And so did that other one in the window!”

“He’s right,” Ken said. “They were shooting at us.”

A dozen voices seemed to speak at once. Over them all, Miss Burton could be heard. “Arrest them!” she called. “They’re insane!”

The next few minutes were a blur of confusion. Afterward, Ken could never remember the sequence of events. He knew only what had occurred. The young men from the party across the alley had given the police their names, and been sent out of the garden. Ken and Sandy and Yurgos had been taken inside, to join Ragusa and Miss Burton. They too had all been asked for their names.

“If you would let us explain-” Miss Burton had begun several times, only to be politely silenced by an officer.

“One moment, please,” he kept telling her. “We will hear your stories in a moment.” Finally, when his fellow officer pocketed his notebook, he said, “And now we would like to know what has happened here. Windows have been broken. There have been reports of shots.”

“We broke the windows,” Ken told him quickly. He felt almost himself again. Only a sore throat remained to remind him of Yurgos’ hands clamped around his neck. “We had to attract attention somehow. They were shooting at us.”

“Shooting?” Yurgos laughed. He too had recovered. He seemed as sure of himself as he had that day when he walked up the *Istria’s* gangplank and identified himself as an Athens policeman. “You can search us, officer.” He gestured toward Ragusa. “Neither of us is armed.”

“Maybe they’re not armed now,” Sandy said, “but they were-both of them. They hid their guns, but if you search the place-“

“Officer,” Miss Burton said, “these two boys-I have already explained that we are fellow passengers on the *Istria*-have obviously taken leave of their senses, and are making insane charges for some totally unknown reason.”

“It’s not unknown to her!” Ken assured the officer. “She, and these other two, are involved in the theft of the Knossos cylinder from the Athens museum!”

“The Knossos cylinder!” The amazement and excitement on the officer’s face told Ken that the man knew about the theft. “You have evidence for this most serious accusation?”

“Of course he hasn’t!” Miss Burton snapped. “I never heard of anything so silly!”

Ken started toward the table, which stood between himself and the window. His eyes were on the woman. He felt sure the sudden rigidity of her face was born of fear. Confidently he picked up a carved wooden candlestick.

"We think the Knossos cylinder is hidden in either this candlestick or the other one," he said, and tried to twist it between his hands. Already he could visualize the round hollow he was certain Ragusa had bored.

The wood was immovable under his pressuring fingers.

Suddenly Miss Burton was smiling. "I understand now," she said indulgently. "Somehow, these boys discovered that these candlesticks are being hollowed out for me, and they have invented this childish explanation for it.

"Only this one is finished so far, Ken," she went on, taking the other candlestick in her hands. "And look-it twists open easily." The top and bottom halves were turning under her manipulation. "My friend here"-she gestured toward Ragusa-"designed them as secret hiding places for my darling little niece's treasures. You know, her favorite beads, and such things. I think they will make a charming present for her, don't you?"

The two halves came apart in her hands, and she held out the cut ends.

The bottom half had been neatly hollowed out.

The little cavity was empty.

Miss Burton laughed outright then. "Of course," she said, "if I should ever turn criminal and decide to steal *two* Knossos cylinders, I would have excellent places to keep them in, wouldn't I? I must remember to tell my little niece this story. She'll think her old auntie made it up, every word!"

CHAPTER XV

A FLOWERY ENDING

The officer turned an angry red face on Ken. He was not sharing Miss Burton's amusement.

"You have broken windows-and aroused this whole neighborhood--"

"Because we were being shot at!" Sandy broke in desperately. "It's true, officer!"

"This is a night of fireworks," the officer said stiffly. "To some ears, perhaps, the sounds are as of shots."

"We can tell the difference between shots and firecrackers," Sandy assured him earnestly. "Besides, when you hear the rest of our story, you'll believe us, I'm sure. This man here, for example"--he pointed to Yurgos--"introduced himself to us as a member of the Athens police. But that isn't what it says on his passport, is it?"

"Athens police?" The officer, confused, turned toward Yurgos.

Yurgos smiled sardonically. "I think I must agree with Miss Burton. These young men--they are insane! Me a police officer! It is ridiculous!"

"But that is what he told us," Sandy insisted. "He said he came aboard the *Istria* in response to the phone call we asked Miss Burton to make to a friend of ours in Athens. You could check that phone call. We think now she never called our friend at all--that she called Yurgos instead, and that he took the cylinder out of a Turkish scimitar we'd bought. He"--he pointed to Ragusa--"was with us when the peddler showed it to us, and that practically proves--"

"Please!" The officer raised a hand. "It is most difficult to follow all you say. But are you telling me now that *you* had the Knossos cylinder? Is that what you are saying?"

"Yes! But we didn't know it! I mean--"

"You see, officer?" Miss Burton's tone was gentleness itself. "These boys are young. Perhaps the excitement of being on their own--of being in strange places--has simply been too much for them. Of course you wouldn't suspect them of having the Knossos cylinder. No reasonable person would. But that they should even pretend to have it--"

"We're not pretending to have it!" Sandy almost shouted the words at her. "I said we *did* have it! We--"

Ken was vaguely aware of Miss Burton talking again, soothingly, saying something about being willing to help pay for the windows the boys had broken.

But his mind was frenziedly trying to piece together what they

knew, what they had seen that night, and the look of fear on Miss Burton's face when he had started toward the table-a look she had lost only when he reached for the candlesticks.

Why had she been afraid just for that moment?

He looked past the table. Nothing stood between it and the window, nothing she could have thought he was heading toward.

Suddenly two separate facts came together in Ken's mind with a blinding flash of understanding.

One was the fact that Yurgos had discovered them outside the house earlier that evening only because he had chosen that moment to walk to the window and look out. But why had he decided to go to the window? Not to look at the fireworks, certainly. Not to look up at the star-filled sky.

The other was that Yurgos had bent down, near the fallen window box, to pick up something just before Sandy rushed him in the belief that Yurgos was reaching for his gun. But there was no gun there. Why, therefore, had Yurgos bent down?

The window box!

The words glowed in Ken's head like some tremendous neon sign. The window box had drawn Yurgos to the window. The window box was what Yurgos was reaching for when Sandy attacked him in the garden.

The police officer was addressing Ken and Sandy firmly. "Miss Burton's offer to help pay for the broken windows is most generous. She has also convinced this gentlemen"-he gestured toward Yurgos-"not to press charges against you for attacking him. You are fortunate in your good friend! We will therefore escort you back to your ship without further trouble. But you will understand that we must ask you not to come ashore again."

"Maybe *we'd* like to prefer some charges!" Sandy said loudly. "He attacked us this afternoon"-he indicated Ragusa-"and we've got witnesses to prove it. *She* knows about it. Ken, tell them!"

Ken touched the redhead's arm. "I think we should agree to go back to the ship," he said quietly.

"But, Ken-!"

"After we have done just one more thing," Ken went on. "Officer, would you be good enough to come down with us into that garden before we go, and help us look through the earth in that window box?"

"You will stay right here-all of you!" Miss Burton's big handbag now dangled open on her left wrist. Her right hand was holding a small revolver fitted with a silencer almost as big as the gun itself.

Her face, no longer smiling, looked as if it had been carved out of stone. Her voice was as cold and as hard as steel.

“Lock that door,” she ordered Yurgos, pointing to the room’s one exit. A jerk of her head commanded Ragusa to stand clear of Ken, Sandy, and the two policemen who were grouped together. “Move back,” she told them, “into that corner of the room.” She started toward them slowly, her revolver aimed straight at one officer’s heart. “Move!” she repeated. “And do not make the mistake of thinking I will not fire this gun if any of you fail to do exactly as I tell you.”

Helpless in the face of her deadly-looking weapon, all four of them shuffled slowly backward.

“Miss Burton-” Ken began.

“Madame-” one of the officers said as Ken spoke.

“Quiet,” she said briefly. “Now you,” she told the officers, “undo your gun belts and let them drop. Now kick them over here. Good! And now take off your uniforms! Quickly!”

“Madame! What-!”

She ignored the interruption. “Two uniformed men came into this house. There probably are dozens of curiosity seekers waiting around outside for them to come out. We will give them what they are waiting for.”

“Oh!” There was sudden admiring comprehension in Ragusa’s voice. “You mean Yurgos and I will be wearing the uniforms!”

“I was sure you could understand, once I had explained it to you in simple words,” she said icily. “Just don’t panic again, as you did this afternoon.”

With great dignity and slowness, the officers were unbuttoning their own jackets. “You will not be permitted to leave the country,” one of them said. “Once it is learned-“

” ‘Once it is learned-’” she mimicked him, and laughed. “It will not be learned’ that two Dubrovnik policemen and two foolish young Americans are lying bound and gagged, locked in this apartment, until we are safely out of the country. You may possibly be found by noon tomorrow, if you are fortunate-if the maid arrives by then. If we have time to tell her that she may take the day off, the discovery will be delayed perhaps for some time.” She was amused again, as she had been when Ken reached for that candlestick. “In any case, you need not concern yourselves about our ability to get away in plenty of time-and with the object you two boys so childishly hoped to obtain,” she added with satisfaction.

Two trim police jackets were dropped to the floor. Yurgos reached for them.

“You fool!” the woman told him. “Not yet! First go out into the garden and get the cylinder. Unlock the door for him,” she commanded Ragusa, “and lock it after him. And you two-back closer against the wall,” she told the boys, motioning them farther from the

door.

They moved obediently. Ken felt his shoulder blades against the smooth plaster surface.

“Back, Ken-back,” Sandy said.

Yurgos was leaving. Ken’s hands itched to reach for him-to do something to blot out the disaster he had brought about by mentioning the window box in the woman’s hearing. Sandy’s oddly meek seconding of her command brought Ken’s head around.

Sandy gave him a swift wink-a definite signal of communication.

What could the redhead mean?

“Back,” Sandy had said. Instinctively Ken pushed himself back flatter against the wall. A tiny projection of some sort poked into his shoulder blade.

“I guess we’ve finally seen the light, haven’t we, Ken?” Sandy was saying. There was a faint emphasis on the word “light,” and the back of Sandy’s hand brushed significantly against Ken’s.

The policemen, ignoring them, were undoing their ties. Both their faces were wooden with fury and chagrin. Miss Burton watched them, her gun steady.

“After all our efforts,” Sandy went on, as if compelled to fill the silence with talk, “we’re right back at the point we started from.”

Again Ken heard the faint emphasis, this time on the words “back” and “point.”

Suddenly he knew what the tiny projection was that was pressing into his shoulder blade.

“Yes,” he told Sandy, keeping his voice even with an effort. He wanted to shout the words. “Yes, it’s a neat switch.”

“Yes,” Sandy agreed, and Ken heard the relief behind the noncommittal syllable.

Footsteps sounded in the hall outside. A faint knock came on the wooden panel, and Yurgos’ voice whispered through the crack. Ragusa unlocked the door, and relocked it when Yurgos was inside.

“Take it.” Miss Burton was speaking to Ragusa.

Yurgos handed the other man a small cloth-wrapped object.

“Put it in the candlestick,” Miss Burton went on, “and do whatever it is you do to keep the two halves from coming apart. And you-hurry now!” The last words, on a rising note of impatience, were spoken to the policemen.

There were methodically removing their shoes.

Very gently Ken was moving against that small point of pressure under his shoulder blade. Should he press the switch upward or downward in order to turn off the lights? It was impossible to guess ahead of time. He would have to try one way first. Then, if nothing happened, the other.

He glanced sideways. For an instant his eyes met Sandy's. Ken knew the big redhead was tense, ready to cover the six feet that separated him from Miss Burton in a single leap.

"I wish I'd kept my mouth shut before," Ken said aloud. As he spoke he was bringing his shoulder downward a fraction of an inch, pressing steadily against that small projection. "If I'd waited until now--"

He felt the switch move--heard it click at the same instant that the room was plunged into darkness.

He dropped flat on the floor. Miss Burton screamed. The pistol went off.

In almost the same breath Sandy was shouting, "Got her, Ken! Quick! The lights!"

Ken was up again, hands fumbling for the switch. He found it and flipped it upward, whirling around as he did so.

Ragusa stood by the table, the two halves of the hollow candlestick in his hands, as rigid as a statue.

Sandy was holding Miss Burton, pinioning her arms behind her. The revolver he had knocked out of her hand was on the floor a few feet away.

Yurgos had seen it just as Ken did. He took a step toward it.

Ken dove at him. He struck as the man bent over--struck him just above the hips.

Yurgos shot forward as if he had been catapulted. His knees struck the window sill. He went headfirst through the opening.

Before Ken could regain his feet, one policeman was moving swiftly, his retrieved gun at the ready, toward a cowering Ragusa. The other officer was at the window, flashlight in one hand, pistol in the other.

Ken and Sandy looked at each other.

Sandy broke into a grin. "Wouldn't you think that Yurgos would know by now that there's a window there?" he said.

"Yes, George, that's what I said," Ken spoke into the phone. "It's safe! It's in a police vault, under police guard. Mr. Trahos, the museum director, was informed five minutes ago. He's due here tomorrow."

On the other end of the line, in Athens, George Pappas was babbling incoherently in English and Greek.

"George!" Ken bellowed finally. "Listen to me! This is a police phone. I can't tie it up all night. Do you want this Global exclusive or don't you? I'll put a story, along with some photographs they let Sandy take, on the plane that flies the Knossos cylinder home tomorrow. But I could give you the main facts right now, if you'd just

listen.”

A policeman came into the room with cups of coffee. Grinning, he put one down beside Ken, and handed the other to Sandy, who grinned back from his perch on the edge of the police captain’s desk.

“Of course we know the main facts,” Ken was saying. “We knew most of them this afternoon. But owing to a slight-well, never mind that now.

“The mastermind of the whole deal is a woman who calls herself Sylvia Burton,” he went on. “She hasn’t confessed yet, but she’s an old hand at confidence games, apparently. The two men who were caught with her are talking plenty... . No, neither one is the man who played the part of the movie director. He’s a Frenchman who’s already gone back to France and the French police have been told where his hideout is. ... Yes, he actually stole the cylinder, and he called the museum director as soon as he was safely out of the building.

“One of the two men caught here was that young Italian who took us shopping in Athens,” Ken was saying a minute later. “He’s a craftsman... . He provided the hiding place for the cylinder after their hush-hush ransom scheme fell through and they decided to negotiate from a safer place outside of Greece.

“He put it into the phony hilt of a Turkish scimitar and ... What? ... Yes, that’s right,” Ken agreed. “Our ‘sultan’s scimitar’, the present we bought for Bert. The peddler who sold it to us was hired for the job-and for the job he and his buddy did the night before.” Quickly Ken told George about the boys’ encounter in the Athens alley.

Several minutes ticked by while Ken explained the confusion over the *Clarion* drawing. As the *Istria* sailed out of Piraeus, Miss Burton had heard Wilshire mention his collection of material on the museum robbery. On her way to her cabin she had made it her business to look through the envelope Wilshire had left on a table in the lounge. When she had seen the drawing she had destroyed it for fear that its misleading resemblance to the innocent Dubon would somehow attract police attention to the *Istria* and delay her passage out of Greek waters.

Several more minutes went into the explanation of the phone call, intended for George himself, which had instead brought Yurgos to the ship.

Sandy finished his coffee. Ken was still funneling words into the phone.

Sandy bent down and shouted past him. “George! I’m starving to death! Haven’t you had enough? We’ll put the rest on the plane!”

“Come back on the plane yourselves,” George Pappas said, loudly enough for them both to hear. “There will be a big celebration. You will be heroes! You will be in the middle of it!”

“Thanks, George, but we’ve had enough of being in the middle of things,” Sandy told him. “Now we’re heading for Switzerland and something really peaceful, like skiing down the Matterhorn.”

“You are crazy!” Pappas assured him. “Nobody skis down the Matterhorn.”

“Good-by, George,” Sandy said firmly. “Come see us in Brentwood.” He released the phone to Ken.

He was stretching wearily five minutes later when Ken finally concluded the conversation. “You going to write that story while I have a well-deserved snack in Dubrovnik’s best restaurant?” Sandy inquired politely. “Or are you going to join me, and then write the story while I regale Wilshire and the rest of our fellow passengers with the stirring tale of our hair-raising experiences?”

“We’d better stick together,” Ken answered just as politely, after serious consideration. “That way we can keep an eye on each other, and make sure neither of us starts tossing bottles around or throwing somebody through a window. We can’t expect to get away with that kind of thing twice in one day.”

THE END

THE MYSTERY OF THE SULTAN’S SCIMITAR

A KEN HOLT Mystery

By Bruce Campbell

And the end of the Ken Holt Series.

So long, guys. It’s been fun traveling with you.